JAMES HADLEY CHASE

'I would find her throat with one hand and with the other I would switch on the little bedside lamp. Then would come the moment that would heal all the wounds she had inflicted on me. That brief moment when her senses would awake from sleep and her eyes would recognize me. She would know why I was there and what I was going to do. I would see the helpless, terrified look that would come into her eyes . . .
I would kill her quickly with my knee on her chest and my hands about her throat. Pinning her to the bed with my weight, she would not have a chance. No one would know who had done it. It could have been any of her men friends . . .'

Also by James Hadley Chase

AN ACE UP MY SLEEVE
JUST ANOTHER SUCKER
I WOULD RATHER STAY POOR
LAY HER AMONG THE LILIES
DOUBLE SHUFFLE
YOU FIND HIM – I'LL FIX HIM
THE GUILTY ARE AFRAID
HAVE A CHANGE OF SCENE
NOT SAFE TO BE FREE
YOU'RE LONELY WHEN YOU'RE DEAD
A LOTUS FOR MISS QUON
THERE'S ALWAYS A PRICE TAG
KNOCK, KNOCK! WHO'S THERE?

and published by Corgi Books

James Hadley Chase

Eve

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EVE

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Eve

CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE I begin to tell you the story of my association with Eve, I must first tell you, as briefly as possible, something about myself and the events that led up to our first meeting.

Had it not been for the extraordinary change in my life at the time when I had resigned myself to the mediocre career as a shipping clerk, I would not have met Eve, and consequently, I would not have endured an experience which was ultimately responsible for spoiling my life.

Although it is now two years since last I saw Eve, I have only to think of her to feel again the craving urge and angry frustration which kept me chained to her during a period when all my energies and attention should have been focused upon my work.

It does not matter what I am doing now. No one has ever heard of me in this Pacific coast town where I came nearly two years ago after I had realized what a worthless and elusive will-o-the-wisp I had been chasing.

But it is not the present nor the future that is important. My story is to do with the past.

Although I am anxious to bring Eve upon my stage without delay, there are a few details about myself, as I have said before, that first must be told.

My name is Clive Thurston. You may have heard of me. I was supposed to be the author of that sensationally successful play *Rain Check*. Although I did not, in fact, write the play I did write three novels which were, in their way, equally successful.

Before *Rain Check* was produced I was, as I am now, a nobody. I lived in Long Beach in a large apartment house near a fish cannery where I worked as a shipping clerk.

Until John Coulson came to stay at the apartment house I lived a monotonous and unambitious existence; the kind of life

that hundreds of thousands of young men lead who have no prospects and who will be doing the same work in another twenty years' time as they are doing now.

Although my life was monotonous and lonely I accepted it with apathetic resignation. I could see no escape from the routine of getting up in the morning, going to work, eating cheap meals, wondering whether I could afford this thing or that and having an occasional adventure with a woman if money allowed. There was no escape until I met John Coulson and even then it was not until he died that I saw my chance and took it.

John Coulson knew he was going to die. For three years he had been fighting tuberculosis and now he could fight no more. Like a dying animal who goes into hiding, he cut himself off from his friends and connections and came to live in the sordid apartment house in Long Beach.

There was something about him that attracted me and he seemed willing enough to share my company.

Perhaps it was because he was a writer. For a long time I had wanted to write, but the labour involved had always discouraged me. I felt that if I could once get started, my latent talents, which I was confident I possessed, would bring me fame and fortune. I suppose there are many of us who think like this, and like many of us, I lacked the initiative to begin.

John Coulson told me that he had written a play which, he assured me, was the finest thing he had ever done. I gladly listened to him, learning some surprisingly interesting things about the technique of play writing and the money that a good play will earn.

Two evenings before he died, he asked me to send his play to his agent. He was now bedridden and could do little to help himself.

'I don't think I'll live to see it produced,' he said moodily, staring out of the window. 'God knows who'll benefit, but that's something my agent will have to arrange. It's a damn funny thing, Thurston, but I have no one to leave anything to. I wish I had children now. It would have made all this work worth while.'

I asked him casually whether his agent was expecting the play and he shook his head. 'No one but you knows that I've even written it.'

The following day was Saturday and the yearly Water Sports Carnival was being held at Alamitos Bay. I went down to the beach with the thousands of other weekenders to watch the yacht racing.

I disliked mixing with crowds, but it was obvious that Coulson was sinking and I felt I had to get away from the atmosphere of pending death that pervaded the house.

I arrived at the harbour as the tiny yachts were being prepared for the most important race of the afternoon. The prize was a gold cup, and competition ran high.

One particular yacht attracted my attention. She was a grand little boat with bright red sails and her lines were designed for speed. There were two men working on her. One, whom I gave only a cursory glance, was a typical longshoreman, but the other was obviously the owner. He was expensively dressed in white flannels and buckskin shoes and around his wrist I noticed a heavy gold bracelet. His big fleshy face had that arrogant expression which comes only from much wealth and power. He stood by the tiller, a cigar clamped between his teeth, watching the other man put the final touches to the boat. I wondered who he was and decided finally that he might either be a movie director or else an oil magnate.

After watching him for a few minutes, I moved away only to turn back at the sound of a heavy fall and a shout of alarm.

The longshoreman had slipped and was now lying on the harbour with a badly fractured leg.

The accident was immediately responsible for my extraordinary change of fortune. I had some experience of handling yachts and I volunteered to take the longshoreman's place and by doing so I shared the honours with the owner of winning the gold cup.

It was only after the race that the owner of the yacht introduced himself to me. When he told me his name I did not at first realize my good fortune. Robert Rowan was, at that time, one of the most powerful men behind the Theatre Guild. He

owned eight or nine theatres and he had a long string of theatrical successes behind him.

He was childishly pleased to have won the cup and embarrassingly grateful for my help. He gave me his card and solemnly promised that if there was anything he could do for me he would do it.

You can now probably see the temptation that lay ahead of me. On my return to the apartment I found Coulson was unconscious; the next day he was dead. His play, ready to be mailed to his agent, lay on my bureau. I did not hesitate for long. Coulson had admitted that he knew of no one who would benefit by the play and I had felt at the time that he might at least have thought of me. It took me only a few minutes to reason with my protesting conscience and then I opened the parcel and read the play.

Although I knew little about play writing, I realized when I had finished it, that the play was outstanding. I sat for a long time considering the chances of detection, but I could see no danger at all. Then before I went to bed I substituted a new title page and cover to the manuscript. Instead of *Boomerang* by John Coulson, the title page now read, *Rain Check* by Clive Thurston. The following day I sent the play to Rowan.

It was almost a year before *Rain Check* was produced. By that time many alterations had been made to the original script as Rowan liked to have his personality impressed upon any theatrical venture that he financed. But in that time, I had become quite used to the feeling that the play was mine and when it was finally produced, scoring an immediate success, I was genuinely proud of my achievement.

It is a great feeling to walk into a crowded room and have someone introduce you and see by the people's faces that you mean something to them. Anyway, it meant a lot to me. It meant a lot too when I began to receive large sums of money, where previously I had to manage on forty dollars a week.

When I was assured that the play would enjoy a long run, I left New York for Hollywood. I felt that with my present reputation I should be in demand and perhaps establish myself as a

top flight script writer. As I was now drawing almost two thousand dollars a week from royalties, I did not hesitate to take an apartment in a modern block off Sunset Boulevard.

Once I had settled down, I determined to exploit my opportunities and after considerable thought and planning I began work on a novel. It was a story of a man who had been hurt in the war and could not love his girl. I had known such a case and I knew what had happened to the girl. It was explosive material and it had made a big impression on me. Somehow I managed to get that impression over in the book. My name helped it, of course, but even at that, it wasn't such a bad piece of work. It sold ninety-seven thousand copies and was still selling by the time my second book was on the market. This one was not so good, but it sold. It was my first attempt at creative writing which I found exceedingly difficult. My third novel was based on the lives of a married couple I knew intimately. The wife had behaved outrageously and I had felt very bad about the final break up. All I had to do was to sit at my typewriter. The book wrote itself and when it was published it scored an immediate success.

I was sure after this that I had the golden touch. I told myself that I could have succeeded without John Coulson's play. I marvelled at my stupidity to have wasted so many years of my life on an office stool when I could have been writing and earning big money.

A few months later, I decided I would have to write a play. *Rain Check* had finished playing on Broadway and was now touring. It was still doing excellent business, but I knew that before long I would be receiving smaller royalties and I did not wish to lower my present standard of living. Besides that, my friends were asking me when I was going to write for the theatre again and my constant excuses were becoming threadbare.

When I began to plan a play I found I had no ideas that could be dramatized. I kept trying. I talked to people, but in Hollywood, no one gives away ideas. I thought and worried, but nothing came. Finally I said the hell with a play, and decided to write another novel. So I sat down at my typewriter and

wrote another novel. I just cut into it and kept writing until I finished it. Then I sent it to my publisher.

Two weeks later, my publisher asked me to lunch. He was very direct and said bluntly that the book was no good. He did not have to convince me. I knew the book was no good the moment I had finished it. So I told him to forget the book. I explained that I had rushed it, that I had been constantly interrupted and that I would let him have something up to standard in a month or so.

I began to hunt for a place where I could work without interruption. I told myself that if I could get away from the mob that demanded my time and attention, if I could find some quiet spot with a good view so that I could get my nerves right, I would write another best seller, and even a great play. I was so sure of myself now that I was certain that, given the right surroundings, I could do really good work. Eventually I found a place that I felt was ideal in every way.

Three Point was a one storey cabin which lay back a few hundred yards from the road to Big Bear Lake. It had a wide porch and a magnificent view across the hills. It had been furnished with every conceivable luxury and a number of modern labour saving devices had been installed, including a small, but powerful generating plant. I was delighted to hire it for the summer.

I hoped that Three Point would be my salvation, but it didn't work out that way. I would get up around nine o'clock and sit on the porch with a pot of strong coffee at my elbow and my typewriter before me. I would stare at the view and get nowhere. I would spend the morning smoking, looking at the view, writing a few lines and tearing them up. In the afternoon I would take the car over to Los Angeles, where I would wander around talking to the movie writers and watching the film stars. In the evening, I would try again, get irritated and finish off the evening by going to bed.

It was during this crisis of my career, when success or failure could be influenced by the slightest mental disturbance, that Eve came into my life. Her influence became so great that I was drawn to her as a pin is drawn to a giant magnet. She never

knew the real extent of her power over me and if she had known, she would not have cared. Her arrogant indifference was the hardest part of her character I had to endure. Whenever I was with her, I had an overwhelming urge to obtain some moral surrender from her, to make her give up the secret strength that she had. The struggle between us was an infernal obsession with me.

But this is enough. My stage is set and my story can begin. I have long planned to write it. I have tried before and failed. This time I may succeed.

It may be that if this book is ever published, it will find its way into Eve's hands. I can imagine her lying in bed, a cigarette between her fingers, reading what I have written. Because her life is peopled by so many unidentified men, who must inevitably be shadowy figures in her mind, she will have forgotten most, if not all, of the things we did together. It may interest her to re-live the futile moments of our association and it may also give her confidence in her strength and ability to continue to stand alone. At least, she will learn when she has reached the end of my story that I have probed deeper into her life than she imagined, and, in stripping some of the camouflage from her, I have also stripped myself.

And when she has reached the last page, I can imagine her, with that contemptuous, wooden expression on her face I have seen so often, tossing the book indifferently aside.

CHAPTER TWO

AT a gas station in San Bernardino, they told me there was a tornado warning out.

The attendant, in smart white overalls with a red triangular badge on his breast pocket, advised me to stay in San Bernardino for the night, but I wouldn't listen.

When I got into the hills, it began to blow. I kept going and a mile further on the stars were blotted out and then torrential rain came down like a black steel curtain shutting in the night with mist and water.

All I could see through the half crescent clearing made by the wind-shield wiper was the rebounding rain on the car's hood and a few feet of the shiny black road in the light of my headlights.

The noise of the wind and the rain against the car made me feel that I was imprisoned in a giant drum upon which some lunatic drummer was beating. All around me came the sound of trees falling and rocks shifting, and above all this, the noise of water against the wheels of the car. Rain flowed down the side windows and reflected my face, lit by the yellow light from the dashboard.

Then I nearly ran off the road. I had the hillside on my left and nothing but a clean drop into the valley on my right. My heart raced as I wrenched at the driving wheel and I fed more gas into the engine. The wind was so fierce that there was hardly any increase in the car's speed. The needle of the speedometer flickered between ten and fifteen miles an hour which seemed to be the best speed I could squeeze out of the engine.

Coming slowly around the next bend, I saw two men standing in the middle of the road. They had lanterns and they wore black slickers that shone in the rain and lantern light.

I slowed down to a crawl as one of them came over.

'Why, hello, Mr. Thurston,' he said, rain from his hat dripping onto my sleeve, 'Making for Three Point?'

I recognized him. 'Hello, Tom,' I said. 'Can I get through?'

'I don't say you won't make it.' His face was the colour of bruised meat from the wind and the rain. 'It'll be bad though. Maybe you'd better go back.'

I started the engine. 'I'll take a chance. Do you think the road's open?'

'A big Packard went through two hours ago. It ain't come back. Maybe it's still all right, but you'd better watch out. The wind up there'll be hell.'

'If a Packard can get through, I'm damned sure I can,' I said and wound up the window and drove on.

I drove around the next sharp bend and edged up the hill, keeping close to the mountain-side. A few more minutes' driving brought me to the narrow mountain track that led through to Big Bear Lake.

The forest stopped abruptly at the foot of the track, and, except for a few jagged boulders on the mountainside, the rest of the track to Big Bear Lake was bare and exposed.

The wind crashed against the car as I drove out of the shelter of the trees. I felt the car rock. The outside wheels lifted a few inches before thudding back onto the road. I cursed. If that had happened when I was pulling around a bend, I would have been flung into the valley. I shifted into low gear and decreased my speed. Twice the car was brought to a standstill by a sudden gust of wind. Each time the engine stalled and I had to act quickly to stop from rolling backwards.

My nerves were badly frayed by the time I reached the crest of the hill. The rain drove against the windshield and I had to lean out of the window to see where I was going. The road was not more than twenty feet wide and I rounded the next bend more by luck than judgment with the the wind tearing at the car, shaking and lifting it. Once round the bend, I found shelter. The rain continued to drum on the roof of the car, but I felt easier knowing that the rest of the run was downhill, out of the wind.

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Three Point was only a few miles further on and although I knew the worst part of the journey was over I continued to drive with caution. It was as well for, without warning, a stationary car suddenly appeared in my headlights and I only managed to slam on my brakes in time. The wheels locked and for one unpleasant moment, I thought I was going to skid off the road; then my bumpers hit the back of the other car and I was thrown forward against the driving wheel.

Cursing the fool who had left this car in the middle of the road without a warning light I stood on the running board of my car while I groped for my flashlight. Rain poured down on me and before stepping to the ground, I turned the light down to see where I was going. Water was up to my hub caps and sending the beam of the flashlight over to the other car, I now realized why it had been left like that. Water was up to the front wheels and had probably got into the distributor.

I could not understand why there was a miniature lake in the road, which, I knew, went steeply downhill for the next few miles. Cautiously, I lowered myself into the water which rose to my calves. Gluey mud sucked at my shoes as I splashed over to the other car. By now, the rain had reduced my hat to irritating sogginess. Impatiently, I pulled it off and threw it away.

When I got over to the stationary car, I peered through the windows. It was empty. I climbed on its running board and worked my way towards the front of it so that I could see the road beyond. The beam from my flashlight showed me that the road had ceased to exist. Trees, boulders and mud completely blocked the track, forming a kind of dam.

The car was a Packard and I decided that this must be the car Tom had told me about.

There was nothing for me to do but walk. I went back to my car and lifted out the smaller of my two bags. I locked the car doors, climbed past the Packard and splashed through the water to the jungle of trees and rocks that blocked the road. Once out of the water, I continued to climb without difficulty. I soon reached the top of the rubble and could look down onto the road below which was, as far as I could see, clear of any further obstruction.

could only mean that this intruder had a companion and I was in half a mind to remain where I was until this other person appeared. However, the wind and my wet clothes decided me. I wasn't going to stand out there any longer. I picked up my bag and walked around to the front door. The door was locked. I took out my keys, opened the door noiselessly and entered the lobby. I put my bag down and as I stood hesitating, wondering whether to go into the sitting room and make myself known or to go straight to the bathroom, the man appeared at the sitting room door.

He stared at me in ugly surprise. 'What the hell do you want?' His voice was coarse and rasping.

I looked him over. 'Good evening. I hope I'm not in the way, but I happen to own this place.'

I expected him to collapse like a pricked balloon, but he became even more aggressive. His mean little eyes snapped at me and two veins at his temples began to swell.

'You mean this is your cabin?' he demanded.

I nodded. 'Don't let it embarrass you. Have a drink – you'll find whisky in the kitchen. I'll run along and take a bath, but I'll be right back.'

Leaving him staring blankly after me, I walked into my bedroom and shut the door. Then I became really infuriated.

Across the room, like stepping stones, lay various feminine garments; a black silk dress, lingerie, stockings, and finally at the bathroom door, a pair of black suede, mud-covered shoes.

A pigskin suitcase lay open on the bed from which spilled other feminine garments. A blue tailored dressing gown with short sleeves was draped over a chair before the electric heater.

I stood staring at this disorder, angry beyond words, but before I could do anything – I was on the point of walking into the bathroom and expressing an opinion of such bad manners – the bedroom door opened and the man came in.

I turned on him. 'What's all this?' I asked, waving my hands at the scattered garments on the floor and the confusion on the bed. 'Did you imagine this was a hotel?'

He fingered his tie uneasily. 'Now, don't be sore. We found the place empty and—'

'All right, all right.' I snapped, fighting down my annoyance. It was really no use making a fuss. They happened to be unlucky that I had returned. 'You certainly know how to make yourself at home,' I went on. 'But never mind. I'm wet and irritable. It's a hell of a night, isn't it? Excuse me, I'll use the spare bathroom.' I pushed past him and walked down the passage to the guest room.

'I'll fix you a drink,' he called after me.

I liked that too. To have a stranger offer me my own Scotch is something I go for in a big way. I slammed the bedroom door and got out of my wet clothes.

After a hot bath, I felt better. After a shave, I felt sufficiently human to wonder what the woman would be like. But my mind recoiled when I thought of the man. If she were anything like him, I was in for an indescribable evening.

I put on a grey whipcord, fixed my hair and glanced at myself in the mirror. I did not look my forty years. Most people thought I was in my early thirties. All right, I was flattered by this. I'm as human as they come. I looked at my square jaw, my high cheekbones and the cleft in my chin. I was satisfied with what I saw. I was tall, rather on the thin side, but my suit fitted me excellently. I could still qualify as a distinguished playwright and novelist, although that was a tag a newspaper had yet to put on me.

I paused as I reached the sitting room door. The man's voice came faintly through the panels of the door, but I could not hear what he was saying. Squaring my shoulders and settling the casual, disinterested expression on my face that I reserved for press meetings, I turned the knob and went in.

CHAPTER THREE

I SAW the woman, slight and dark haired, squatting on h heels before the fire. She had on the short-sleeved dressin gown that had been on the chair in my bedroom. Although sh must have known that I had entered the room, she did not loo round. As she held her hands towards the fire I saw her wedding ring. I also noticed that her shoulders were a shade wide than her hips and that is the way I like a woman to be built.

I did not mind her ignoring my entrance. I did not mind the wedding ring. But I did mind the dressing gown.

No woman looks her best in a dressing gown. Even if she did not know who I was, she might at least have dressed. It did not occur to me that she might not give a damn how she looked. I was judging her by the standards of the other women I knew. They would prefer me to see them naked than in a dressing gown.

With my reputation, looks and money, it was inevitable that women should spoil me. At first I enjoyed their attentions although I knew that the majority of them treated me as they treated any other elgible bachelor in Hollywood. They wanted me for my money, my name, my parties and for everything except myself.

Most women, if they had the right appeal, interested me, Good-looking, well-dressed women were an essential part of my background. They stimulated me, they were my recreation and they bolstered up my ego. I liked to have them around as some people like having good pictures on their walls. But, lately, they bored me. I found that my relations with them had developed into a series of strategical moves, in which both sides were expert, to obtain, on their part, the maximum entertainment, presents and attention, and on my part, a few hours of disillusioned rapture.

Carol was the one exception. We had met in New York when

I was waiting for *Rain Check* to be produced. She was, at that time, Robert Rowan's personal secretary. She liked me and, oddly enough, I liked her. It was she who had encouraged me to go to Hollywood where she was now working as script writer for International Pictures.

I doubt if I am capable of loving any woman for long. In a way, I suppose, I should be pitied for this, as obviously there must be many advantages in which seems to me to be the stale routine of having one woman at your side for the rest of your days. If there are no advantages, then why do so many people marry? I feel then, that I have been cheated of something because I am not like the ordinary man in the street.

There was a time, before I came to Hollywood, when I did seriously consider marrying Carol. I enjoyed her company and considered her more intelligent than any other woman I knew.

But Carol was busy at the Studios and we seldom met during the day. I had a lot of women on my hands and my time was taken up not only during the day, but most nights as well. Carol kidded me about those women, but she didn't seem to mind. It was only when I was a little drunk one night and told her that I loved her that she gave herself away. She may have been a little drunk too, but I do not think so. For a couple of weeks, I felt like a heel when I went around with another woman, but after that, I stopped worrying. I supposed I became used to the idea that Carol loved me, in the same way as I became used to most things if they lasted long enough.

While I was looking at the woman, the man, who had been fixing drinks at the sideboard came over and gave me a Scotch and soda. He looked a little drunk and now that we were in a good light, I saw he needed a shave.

'I'm Barrow,' he said, breathing whisky fumes in my face. 'Harvey Barrow. I'm certainly embarrassed busting in like this, but there was nothing else I could do.' He stood close to me, his thick set body between me and the woman by the fire.

I was not interested in him. I would not have noticed if he had dropped dead at my feet. I moved a few paces back so I could see the woman. She stayed by the fire as if she ~~did not~~

know I was in the room and oddly enough I found her attitude of deliberate indifference pleasantly exciting.

Barrow tapped my arm. I took my eyes off the woman and concentrated on him. He kept apologizing for breaking into my cabin so I told him curtly that it was all right and that I would have done the same thing myself if I had been in his place. Then casually I introduced myself, keeping my voice low so that the woman should not hear me. If she wanted to make an impression on me I would keep my identity from her to the last moment and then enjoy the look of dismay that would be certain to come when she realized whom she had been ignoring.

I had to repeat my name twice before he got it and, even then, it did not mean anything to him. I actually helped him by adding 'the author', but I could see he had never heard of me. He was the kind of stupid ignoramus who has never heard of anyone. From that moment I was through with him.

'Glad to meet you,' he said solemnly, shaking my hand. 'It's pretty nice of you not to get sore. Some guys would have kicked me out.'

Nothing would have pleased me more, but I said untruthfully. 'That's all right,' and looked past him at the woman. 'Tell me, is your wife frigid, a deaf-mute or just coy?'

He followed my glance and his coarse, red face tightened.

'This puts me in a bit of a jam, ol' boy,' he said, his voice a mumble in my ear. 'She ain't my wife and she's as mad as hell. She got wet and a dame like her doesn't like getting wet.'

'I see.' I felt suddenly disgusted. 'Well, never mind. I want to meet her,' and I walked over to the fire and stood close to the woman.

She turned her head, looked at my feet and then looked abruptly up at me.

I smiled. 'Hello,' I said.

'Hello,' she returned and looked back into the fire.

I had only one brief glance at her heart-shaped face with its firm mouth, stubborn chin and strangely disconcerting eyes. But it was enough. I had a sudden stiffled feeling, the kind of feeling you get when on top of a high mountain, and I knew what that meant.

It wasn't that she was pretty. She was, if anything, plain, but there was something magnetic about her that stirred me. Perhaps magnetic was not quite the right word. I instinctively knew that behind her mask she was primitively bad and there was something almost animal in her make-up. Just to look at her was like getting a jolt of electricity.

I decided that, after all, the evening was not going to be so bad. In fact, it looked as if it were going to be exceedingly interesting.

'Won't you have a drink?' I asked, hoping that she would look up again, but she didn't. She lowered herself to the carpet and tucked her legs under her.

'I have one.' She pointed to the glass that stood near her in the hearth.

Barrow came over. 'This is Eve . . . Eve . . .' and he floundered, his face reddening.

'Marlow,' the woman said, her fist clenched tightly in her lap.

'Yeah,' Barrow said quickly. 'I've a lousy memory for names.' He looked at me and I could see he had already forgotten mine. I was not going to help him. If a man could not remember the name of his mistress then to hell with him.

'So you got wet,' I said to the woman and laughed.

She looked up. I don't believe in first impressions, but I knew she was a rebel. I knew she had a hell of a temper, swift, violent and uncontrolled. Although she was slight, her whole make-up – her eyes, the way she held herself, her expression – gave the impression of strength. She had two deep furrows above the bridge of her nose. They were responsible to some degree for the character in her face, and could only have come from worry and much suffering. I became intensely curious to know more about her.

'I did get wet,' she said and laughed too.

Her laugh startled me. It was unexpectedly pleasing as well as infectious. When she laughed, she glanced up and her expression altered, the hard lines went away and she looked younger. It was difficult to guess her age. Somewhere in the

thirties; maybe thirty-eight, maybe thirty-three; when she laughed, she could have been twenty-five:

Barrow looked a little sick. He eyed us both suspiciously. He had reason. If he listened carefully he would have heard my glands working.

'I got wet too,' I said, sitting down in the armchair close to her. 'If I'd known it was going to be as bad as this, I would have spent the night in San Bernadino. I'm certainly glad now I didn't.' They both gave me a quick look. 'Have you come far?'

There was a pause. Eve looked into the fire. Barrow rolled his glass between his thick fingers. You could almost hear him think.

'Los Angeles,' he said, at last.

'I get around Los Angeles quite a bit,' I said, speaking to Eve. 'How come I've never seen you before?'

She gave me a hard, blank stare and then looked quickly away. 'I don't know,' she said.

Perhaps Barrow saw what I was going to do, for he suddenly finished his whisky and tapped Eve on her shoulder.

'You'd better go to bed,' he said in a domineering voice.

I thought if she has got what I think she has then she'll tell him to go to hell; but she didn't. 'All right,' she said indifferently and rolled onto her knees.

'You mustn't go yet,' I said. 'Aren't you two hungry? I have some stuff in the ice box that wants eating. What do you say?'

Barrow was watching Eve with uneasy, possessive eyes. 'We had dinner at Glendora on our way up. She'd better go . . . she must be tired.'

I looked at him and laughed, but he wouldn't play. He stared down at his empty glass, veins throbbing in his temples.

Eve stood up. She was even smaller and slighter than I had first supposed. Her head barely reached my shoulder.

'Where do I sleep?' she asked. Her eyes looked over my shoulder.

'Please keep the room you're in now. I'll use the guest room. But, if you don't really want to go to bed, just yet, I'd be glad to have you stay.'

'I want to go.' She was half-way to the door.

When she had gone, I said, 'I'll see if she has everything,' and followed her out before Barrow could move.

She was standing by the electric heater, her hands behind her head. She stretched, yawned and when she saw me in the doorway, her mouth pursed and a calculating expression came into her eyes.

'Have you everything you need?' I asked, smiling at her. 'Sure you won't have something to eat?'

She laughed. I had a suspicion that she was mocking me and she knew why I was so concerned for her comfort. I hoped that she did know, because it would save time and dispense with the preliminary advances.

'I don't want anything . . . thank you.'

'Well, if you're sure, but I want you to feel at home. This is the first time I've had a woman in my cabin, so it's kind of an occasion.' I knew I had made a mistake as soon as I had spoken.

The smile immediately went from her eyes and the cold quizzing look came back. 'Oh?' she said, moving to the bed. She took a pink silk night dress out of her grip and tossed it carelessly into the chair.

She knew I was lying and the way her expression changed told me she expected me to be a liar anyway. This annoyed me. 'Is that hard to believe?' I asked, stepping further into the room.

She bundled various garments scattered on the bed into her bag and then moved it onto the floor. 'Is what hard to believe?' she asked, going to the dressing table.

'That I don't have women here?'

'It's nothing to me who you have here, is it?'

Of course she was right, but I was irritated by her indifference.

'Put like that,' I said, feeling snubbed, 'I suppose it isn't.'

She patted her hair absently and looked hard at herself in the mirror. I felt that she had forgotten that I was in the room.

'You'd better let me have your wet clothes,' I said. 'I'll put them in the kitchen to dry.'

'I can take care of them.' She turned abruptly away from the mirror and pulled her dressing gown more closely to her. The two furrows above the bridge of her nose were knitted in a frown. But, in spite of her plainness, and she looked very plain with that wooden look on her face, she intrigued me.

She glanced at the door and then at me. She did this twice before it dawned on me that she was silently telling me to go. It was a new experience for me and I did not like it.

'I want to go to bed . . . if you don't mind,' she said and turned away from me.

No gratitude, no thanks, no question about taking my room, just a cool, deliberate brush-off.

Barrow was fixing himself a drink when I entered the sitting room. He lurched unsteadily as he made his way back to the armchair. He sat down and stared up at me, screwing up his eyes to see me more clearly. 'Don't get ideas about her,' he said, suddenly banging his fist down on the armchair. 'You lay off. Do you understand?'

I stared at him. 'Are you talking to me?' I said, outraged that he dared to take such an attitude.

His red face sagged a little. 'You leave her alone,' he mumbled. 'She's mine for tonight. I know what you're up to, but let me tell you something.' He edged forward and pointed a stumpy finger at me, his slack mouth working. 'I've bought her. She cost me a hundred bucks. Do you hear? I've bought her! So keep off the grass.'

I didn't believe him. 'You couldn't buy a woman like that. Not a down-at-heel punk like you.'

He slopped whisky over the carpet. 'What was that?' He looked up at me with watery, mean eyes.

'I said you couldn't buy a woman like that because you're a down-at-heel punk.'

'You'll be sorry for that,' he said. The two veins in his temple beat faster. 'As soon as I saw you, I knew you'd start trouble. You're going to try to take her from me, aren't you?'

I grinned at him. 'Why not? There's nothing you can do about it, is there?'

'But I've bought her, damn you,' he exclaimed, punching the

arm of the chair. 'Don't you know what that means? She's mine for tonight. Can't you act like a gentleman?'

I still didn't believe him. 'Let's have her in,' I said, laughing at him. 'After all, a hundred dollars isn't a great deal of money. I might offer more.'

He struggled out of his chair. He was drunk, but there was a lot of weight in his shoulders. If he caught me when I wasn't ready for him, he might do me some damage. I backed away.

'Now don't get excited,' I said, giving ground as he crowded me. 'We can settle this without fighting about it. Let's get her in . . .'

'She's had a hundred bucks from me,' he said, speaking in a low furious voice. 'I've waited eight weeks for this. When I asked her to come away with me she said all right. But when I went to her place her goddam maid said she was out. Four times she pulled that trick on me and each time I knew she was upstairs laughing at me and watching me from her window. But I wanted her. I was a sucker, see? I raised the price every time I called. And she came when I said a hundred bucks. It was all right until you turned up. Neither you nor any other monkey will stop me now.'

He made me feel a little sick. I still only half believed him, but I was certain I could not have him in the cabin any longer. He had to go.

I took out my wallet and tossed a hundred dollar note at his feet. As an afterthought I added another ten. 'Get out,' I said. 'There's your money with interest.'

He stared down at the money, blood leaving his face. He made a soft choking noise as if he were trying to clear the phlegm in his throat. Then he raised his face and I saw I had a fight on my hands. I did not want to fight him, but if he wanted it that way, he could have it.

He shuffled towards me, his long arms held forwards as if he were going to tackle me. When he was within reach, he made a grab at me. I did not avoid him, but stepped close and slammed my fist in his face and ripped down. The big signet ring I wore on my little finger ploughed a furrow in his cheek. He rocked back with a grunting gasp and I hit him again on the bridge of

his nose. He went down heavily on his hands and knees. Then I walked over to him and deliberately taking aim, I kicked him under his chin. His head snapped back and he collapsed on the carpet. He was finished and he hadn't even touched me.

Eve stood in the doorway watching. Her eyes were wide with surprise.

I smiled at her. 'It's all right,' I said, blowing on my knuckles. 'Go back to bed. He's leaving in a moment.'

'You didn't have to kick him,' she said coldly.

'No.' I liked the flash of anger in her eyes. 'I shouldn't have done that. I guess I got mad. I wish you'd go away.'

She went then and I heard the bedroom door close.

Barrow sat up shakily and put his hand to his face. Blood ran down his fingers onto his cuff. He looked at it stupidly and then touched his throat.

I sat on the table and watched him. 'You've got a two mile walk to Big Bear Lake. You can't miss the road. Just keep straight on downhill. There's a hotel before you reach the lake. They'll put you up. Now, beat it.'

He did something I hadn't expected from him. He put his hands to his face and wept. That told me he was yellow right through.

'Get up and beat it,' I said in disgust. 'You make me sick.'

He got up and moved to the door. His arm was across his eyes and he was snivelling like a kid who's hurt.

I picked up the hundred and ten dollar bills and shoved them into his top pocket.

He actually thanked me. He was as yellow as that.

I took him to the front door, gave him his bag that stood in the lobby and shoved him into the rain.

'I don't like your kind,' I said, 'so keep out of my way.'

I watched him move down the stoop, then the rain and the wind and the dark closed around him.

I shut and locked the door and stood in the lobby. I had a tight feeling in my chest and head and I badly wanted a drink. But there was one thing I had to know which wouldn't wait for a drink. I went to my bedroom and pushed open the door.

Eve stood by the dressing table, her arms locked tightly across her breasts. Her eyes were watchful.

'He's gone,' I said, remaining in the doorway. 'I gave him the hundred dollars you owed him and he actually thanked me.'

There was no change in her expression, nor did she say anything. She had the stillness of a cornered, dangerous animal.

I eyed her. 'Don't you feel sorry for him?'

Her mouth tightened in contempt. 'Why should I feel sorry for any man?'

When she said that I knew what she was. I didn't have to kid myself any longer. I really hadn't thought that Barrow was lying. The stuff about the maid and how he had bargained was too smooth to be a lie. I was hoping it was a lie, but now, I knew it wasn't.

So she was anybody's woman. No one would have known it to look at her. She had ignored me. She – a woman who was looked upon by society as an outcast – had had the audacity to ignore me. I suddenly wanted to hurt her as I never had wanted to hurt anyone before.

'He told me he'd bought you,' I said, moving into the room and closing the door. 'You're very deceptive, aren't you? You know I really didn't think you would be for sale. A hundred dollars, wasn't it? Well, I've taken you over, only don't think I am paying any more. I'm not, because I can't imagine you could be worth more than a hundred dollars to me.'

She didn't move nor did her wooden expression change. Her eyes were a shade darker and the sides of her nostrils had gone white. She leaned against the dressing table, one small white hand playing with a heavy brass ashtray that happened to be at her side.

I walked over to her. 'It's no use looking at me like that. I'm not afraid of you. Come on, show me what you can do.'

As I reached out for her, she suddenly whipped up the ash-tray and smashed it down on my head.

CHAPTER FOUR

It is true to say that most men lead two lives – a normal life and a secret life. Society is, of course, only able to judge a man's character by his normal life. If he makes a mistake, however, and his secret life becomes public property, then he is judged by his own secret standards and is, more often than not, ostracized as a punishment. In spite of this, he is still the same man who, a moment before, received the plaudits of Society. At least, he is the same man with the one important difference: he has been found out.

By now, because of my complete frankness, you may have come to the conclusion that I am an exceedingly unpleasant person. You may even have decided that I am unethical, dishonest, vain and worthless. These conclusions are not due to your insight and perception, they are due entirely to my own frankness.

If you met me socially, if you became my friend, you would find me quite as agreeable as any one of your other friends because I should be most careful always to be at my best in your company.

I would not bother with such an elementary point as this if it were not for the fact that you may wonder why Carol loved me. Even now I remember her with deep attachment. She was a person of great sincerity and integrity. I would not like you to judge her by my standards because she loved me.

Carol knew only that part of my nature that I chose to reveal to her. Towards the end of our association, circumstances became so difficult to control that she did finally discover my faults. But up to that time, I hoodwinked her as successfully as some of you are hoodwinking those who love you.

It was because Carol was always understanding and sympathetic that, after staying two days at Three Point, following the night I first met Eve, I drove into Hollywood to see her.

The service station at San Bernardino had taken care of my car. They had told me that they had also taken care of the Packard. As I drove down the hill road from Big Bear Lake, I came upon a gang of men working on the obstruction in the road. They had nearly cleared it, but I had some difficulty in passing. The foreman of the gang knew me and he had planks laid across the soft ground and a bunch of men practically carried the car over.

I reached Carol's apartment off Sunset Strip about seven o'clock. Frances, her maid, told me she had only just returned from the Studios and was changing.

'But come right in, Mr. Thurston,' she said, beaming at me. 'She won't be but a few minutes.'

I followed her ample form into Carol's living room. It was a nice room, modern and quiet and the concealed lighting was restful. I wandered around while Frances fixed me a highball. She always made a fuss over me and Carol had once laughingly told me that Frances considered me her most distinguished visitor.

I sat down and admired the room. It was simply furnished. The chair and large settee were of grey suede and the hangings were wine coloured.

'Every time I come into this room,' I said, taking the highball Frances offered me, 'I like it better. I must ask Miss Rae to get me out some designs for my place.'

Carol came in while I was speaking. She was wearing a foamy négligé, caught in at her waist by a broad red sash, and her hair was dressed loosely to her shoulders.

I thought she looked pretty good. She wasn't a beauty – at least, she wasn't stamped from the Hollywood mould. She reminded me, as she came in, of Hepburn. She was the same build, nicely put together with the right things in the right places. Her complexion was pale which offset her scarlet lips and her skin seemed to have been pulled too tightly across her face, revealing the bone structure. Her eyes, her best feature, were big, intelligent and alive.

'Why, hello, Clive,' she said gaily, coming swiftly across the room. She held a cigarette in an eighteen-inch holder. The long

holder was her only mannerism. It was a clever one because it showed off her beautiful hands and wrists. 'Where have you been these last three days?' Then she paused and looked questioning at my bruised forehead. 'What have you been doing?'

I took her hands. 'Fighting a wild woman,' I said, smiling down at her.

'I might have guessed that,' she said, glancing at my knuckles, still skinned from the punch I'd given Barrow. 'She must have been a very wild woman.'

'Oh, she was,' I said, leading her to the settee. 'The wildest woman in California. I've come all the way from Three Point to tell you about her.'

Carol settled herself in the corner of the settee and drew her legs up under her.

'I think I'll have a highball,' she said to Frances. A little of her gaiety had gone from her eyes. 'I have a feeling Mr. Thurston's going to shock me.'

'Nonsense,' I said. 'I hope to interest you, but that's all. I'm the one who's shocked.' I sat down by her side and took her hand. 'Have you been working very hard today? There are smudges under your eyes. They suit you, of course, but do they mean tears and toil or are you, at last, becoming dissolute?'

Carol sighed. 'I've been working. I have no time to be dissolute and I'm sure I'd be very bad at it. I am never any good at anything that doesn't interest me.' She took the highball from Frances and smiled her thanks.

Frances went away.

'Now,' she went on, 'tell me about your wild woman. Are you in love with her?'

I looked at her sharply. 'Why do you think I must fall in love with every woman I met? I'm in love with you.'

'So you are.' She patted my hand. 'I must remember that. Only, after three days without seeing you, I was wondering if you had dropped me. So you're not in love with her?'

'Don't be tiresome Carol,' I said, not liking her mood. 'I'm most certainly not in love with her,' and settling back against the cushions I told her about the storm, Barrow and Eve. But, I didn't give her all the details.

'Well, go on,' she said as I paused to finger the bruise on my forehead. 'After she had laid you out, what did she do? Pour water over you or skip with your wallet?'

'She skipped without my wallet. She didn't take a thing . . . she wasn't the type. Don't get this woman wrong, Carol, she isn't the usual kind of hustler.'

'They seldom are,' Carol murmured smiling at me.

I ignored that. 'While I was unconscious, she must have dressed, packed her grip and gone off into the storm. That was quite a thing to do . . . it was blowing and raining like hell.'

Carol studied my face. 'After all, Clive, even a hustler has her pride. You were rather beastly to her. In a way, I admired her for knocking you on your conceited head. Who was the man, do you suppose?'

'Barrow? I have no idea. He looked like a travelling salesman. Just the kind of jerk who'd pay a woman to go out with him.'

I hadn't told Carol about giving Barrow the hundred and ten dollars. I didn't think she'd understand that part of the story.

'I suppose you didn't want to get rid of him so you could have a heart to heart chat with the lady?'

I felt suddenly irritated that she should have touched truth so quickly. 'Really, Carol,' I said sharply, 'a woman of that type doesn't appeal to me. Aren't you being a little ridiculous?'

'Sorry,' she said, wandering over to the window. There was a pause, then she went on, 'Peter Tennett said he'd be over. Will you have supper with us?'

'I now regretted telling her about Eve. 'Not tonight,' I said, 'I'm tied up. Is he calling for you?'

I wasn't tied up, but I had an idea at the back of my mind and I wanted the evening to myself.

'Yes, but you know Peter . . . he's always late.'

I knew Peter Tennett all right. He was the only one of Carol's friends who gave me an inferiority complex. But I liked him. He was a grand guy. We got along fine together, but he had too many genuine talents for me. He was producer, director, script writer, and technical adviser all rolled into one. Everything he undertook had, so far, been successful. He had

the magic touch and he ranked as number one at the Studios. I hated to think what he made in a year.

'Can't you really come?' Carol asked, a little wistfully. 'You ought to see more of Peter. He might do something for you.'

Lately, Carol had been continually suggesting various people who might put something in my way. It irritated me that she should think I needed help.

'Do something for me?' I repeated, forcing a laugh. 'What on earth could he do for me? Why, Carol, I'm getting along fine . . . I don't need any help.'

'Sorry again,' Carol said, not turning from the window. 'I seem to be saying all the wrong things tonight, don't I?'

'It isn't you at all,' I said, going over to her. 'I've still got a headache and I'm edgy.'

She turned. 'What are you doing, Clive?'

'Doing? Well, I'm going out to dinner. My – my publishers . . .'

'I don't mean that. What are you working at? You've been at Three Point for two months now. What's happening?'

This was the one subject I wanted to avoid with Carol. 'Oh, a novel,' I said carelessly. 'I'm just laying out the blueprint. I start working seriously next week. Don't look so worried,' and I tried to smile at her assuringly.

Carol was an extraordinarily difficult person to lie to. 'I'm glad about the novel,' she said, shadows in her eyes, 'but I wish it were a play. There's not much in a novel, is there, Clive?'

I raised my eyebrows, 'I don't know . . . film rights . . . serial rights . . . maybe Collier's will take it. They paid Imgram fifty thousand dollars for his serial rights.'

'Imgram wrote an awfully good book.'

'And I'm going to write an awfully good book too,' I said. Even to me, it sounded a little lame. 'I'll write another play in a little while, but I've got this idea for a book and I don't want it to grow cold on me.'

I had an uneasy feeling that she was going to ask me what the book was about. If she'd done that, I would have been in a spot, but at that moment Peter came in and for once I was glad of the interruption.

Peter was one of the few successful Englishmen in Hollywood. He still had all his clothes made in London and the Sackville Street cut was right for his English type of figure, broad in the shoulders and slimming down at the hips.

His dark, thoughtful face lit up when he saw Carol. 'Not dressed yet?' he said, taking her hand. 'But looking very lovely. Sure you're not too tired to come out tonight?'

'Of course not,' Carol said smiling.

He looked over at me. 'How are you, my dear boy?' He shook hands. 'Doesn't she look wonderful?'

I said she certainly did and noticed his eyes were question marks when he saw my bruise.

'Give him a drink, Clive, while I dress,' Carol said. 'I won't be long.' She looked over at Peter. 'He's being stuffy ... he won't dine with us.'

'Oh, but you must ... this is an occasion, isn't it, Carol?'

Carol shook her head helplessly. 'He's dining with his publishers. ... I don't believe it, but I suppose I'd better be tactful and pretend I do. Look at that bruise ... he's been fighting a wild woman.' She laughed, turning to me, 'Tell him, Clive ... he may think it's a story.'

Peter beat me to the door. He opened it. 'Don't hurry,' he said. 'I'm feeling very leisurely tonight.'

'But I'm hungry,' Carol protested. 'Don't let's be too late,' and she ran from the room.

Peter came over to the little bar in the far corner of the room where I was fixing myself another drink. 'So you've been fighting, have you?' he said. 'That's quite a nasty bruise you have there.'

'Never mind about that,' I said. 'What will you drink?'

'A little whisky, I suppose.' He leaned against the bar and selected a cigarette from a heavy gold case. 'Carol's told you the news?'

I gave him bourbon and water. 'No ... what news?'

Peter raised his eyebrows.' Funny kid ... now I wonder why ...' He lit his cigarette.

I had a sudden sinking feeling. 'What news?' I repeated, staring at him.

'She has been given the script of the year. It was arranged this morning . . . Imgram's novel.'

I slopped whisky on the polished bar. Hearing him say that was wormwood to me. Of course, I knew I couldn't have handled Ingram's theme. It was too big for me, but it came as a blow to hear that a kid like Carol was to do it.

'Why, that's terrific,' I said, trying to look pleased. 'I've been reading it in Collier's. It's a great story. You producing?'

He nodded. 'Yes, there are all sorts of angles. It's just the kind of story I've been looking for. Of course, I wanted Carol to do the script, but I didn't think Gold would agree. Then, while I was working out how best to persuade him, he actually called me in to say she's to do it.'

I came around from behind the bar and carried my drink to the settee. I was glad to sit down. 'What will it mean?'

Peter shrugged. 'Well, a contract, of course . . . bigger money . . . screen credit . . . and another chance if she makes good.' He tasted his whisky. 'And she will, of course. She is very talented.'

I was beginning to think that everyone in this game had talent except myself.

He came over and dropped into an armchair. He seemed to sense that the news had shaken me. 'What are you working on now?'

I was getting tired of this interest in my work. 'A novel,' I said shortly. 'Nothing of interest to you.'

'That's a pity. I'd like to film something of yours.' He stretched out his long legs. 'I've been meaning to talk to you before. Ever thought of working for Gold? I could give you an introduction.'

I wondered suspiciously if Carol had been getting at him.

'What's the use, Peter? You know me. I can't work for anyone. From what Carol tells me working at your Studio is refined hell.'

'It's also big money,' Peter said, taking the drink I handed to him. 'Think it over and don't leave it too long. The public has a short memory and Hollywood an even shorter one.' He didn't look at me, but I had a feeling that there was more to it than just casual conversation. It was almost a warning.

I lit a cigarette and brooded. There is one thing you don't tell other writers or producers in Hollywood. You don't tell them that you are out of ideas. They find that out quick enough for themselves.

I knew that if I went back to Three Point the same thing would happen as had happened these past two days. I'd think about Eve. I hadn't stopped thinking about her since I found myself lying on the floor in the deserted cabin with the sun coming through the curtains. I had tried to wash her out of my mind, but I couldn't do it. She was there in my bedroom, she was sitting with me on the porch, she was staring at me from the blank sheet of paper in my typewriter.

It finally got so bad that I had to talk to someone about her. That was why I had come into Hollywood to see Carol. But when I began to talk, I found I couldn't tell her the things that were really on my mind. I couldn't tell Peter either. I couldn't tell them how I was feeling about Eve. They would have thought I was crazy.

Maybe I was crazy. I had the pick of some twenty smart, attractive women. I had Carol who loved me and who meant a lot to me. But that didn't seem enough for me. I had to become infatuated with a prostitute.

Perhaps, infatuated wasn't the right word. I had sat on the porch, the previous night, with a bottle of Scotch at my elbow and I had tried to reason it out. Eve had hurt my pride. Her cold indifference had been a challenge to me. I felt she was living in a stone fortress and I had to storm that fortress and break down its walls.

I was pretty drunk by the time I'd come to these conclusions, but I'd made up my mind I was going to conquer her. All the women I'd played around with in the past had been too easy. I wanted a proposition that I could really get my teeth into. Eve would give me a run. She'd be difficult and the idea excited me. It would be a contest with no holds barred. She wasn't an innocent little thing who could be twisted around my finger without any effort. She had unconsciously thrown down the challenge and I was going to take it up. I had no doubts what the final results would be. Nor did I think of what would happen once

I'd taken her by storm. That could take care of itself when th
time came.

I snapped out of my thoughts as Carol came in. She ha
changed into an ice-blue evening dress over which she wore
short ermine coat.

'Why didn't you tell me?' I said, jumping to my feet. 'I'n
terribly glad and proud of you, Carol.'

She looked at me searching. 'It is exciting, isn't it, Clive'
Won't you come now . . . we ought to celebrate.'

I wanted to, but I had something more important to do. If
we'd been alone, I'd have gone with her, but with Peter, it
wasn't quite the same thing.

'I'll join you later if I can,' I said. 'Where are you eating?'

'The Vine Street Brown Derby,' Peter said. 'How long will
you be?'

'It depends,' I said. 'Anyway, if I don't turn up, I'll meet you
both here after dinner . . . all right?'

Carol put her hand in mind. 'It'll have to be,' she said. 'You
will try, won't you?'

Peter got up. 'Well, then, let's go. Are you coming our
way?'

'I promised to meet my publisher at eight,' I explained. It
was only half past seven. 'Do you mind if I stay here for a few
minutes? I'd like to finish my drink and I have some calls to
make.'

'No . . . come on, Peter, we mustn't interfere with business.'
Carol waved to me. 'Then we'll see you? Are you going back to
Three Point tonight?'

'I think so, otherwise, if I'm very late, I'll go over to the
penthouse, but, I want to start work tomorrow.'

When they had gone, I poured myself out another whisky
and picked up the telephone book. There were a number of
Marlows in the book. Then with a sudden feeling of excitement
I saw her name. The address was a house on Laurel Canyon
Drive. I had no idea where that was.

For several seconds, I hesitated, then I picked up the tele-
phone and dialled her number. I listened to the steady burr-
burr of the bell, then there was a click and my blood began to

move around in me, like a prospective tenant looking over a house.

A woman, it wasn't Eve, said, 'Hello?'

'Miss Marlow?'

'Who is calling?' The voice was cautious.

I grinned into the telephone. 'She won't know my name.'

There was a pause, then the woman said, 'Miss Marlow wants to know what you want.'

'Tell Miss Marlow to come off her high horse,' I said. 'I've been advised to call her.'

There was another pause, then Eve came on the line. 'Hello,' she said.

'Can I come and see you?' I kept my voice low so she wouldn't recognize it.

'You mean now?'

'In half an hour.'

'I suppose so.' She sounded doubtful. 'Do I know you?'

I thought this was a hell of a conversation. 'You will before long,' I said and laughed.

She laughed too. Her laugh sounded good on the telephone. 'Then you'd better come along,' she said and hung up.

It was as simple and as easy as that.

CHAPTER FIVE

LAUREL CANYON DRIVE was a narrow street with a scattering of small-town style frame dwellings, partly hidden by hedges and shrubs.

I drove slowly down the street until I saw the number of Eve's house painted on a small white gate I stopped and got out.

There was no one in sight and the house itself was discreet. Once I was through the gate, the high hedge hid me from the street. I walked down the path that went steeply to the front door which, in its turn, was screened by a built-in porch. The windows on each side of the door were curtained with cream muslin. I had to walk down several wooden steps before I was level with the front door.

The knocker on the door was an iron ring which passed through the body of a naked woman. It was a nice design and I studied it for a few seconds before I knocked. I waited, aware that my heart was thumping with suppressed excitement.

Almost immediately I heard an electric light switch click on and then the door opened. A tall, angular woman, almost as tall as myself, stood squarely in the doorway.

The light in the passage floodlit me while she remained in the shadows. I could feel her eyes crawling over me, then as if satisfied by what she saw, she stood aside.

'Good evening, sir. Have you an appointment?'

As I stepped round her into the lobby, I looked curiously at her. She was a red-faced woman of about forty-five or so. Her face was sharp with a pointed chin, pointed nose and small bright eyes. Her smile had just the right blend of friendly servility.

'Good evening,' I said. 'Miss Marlow in?'

I felt acute embarrassment and irritation. It was hateful to me that this woman should see me and should know why I had come to this sordid little house.

'Will you come this way, sir?' She moved down the passage and opened a door.

My mouth was dry and I felt a pulse beating in my temples as I entered the room.

It was not a large room. Facing me was a dressing table fitted with a bevelled mirror; on the floor in front of the dressing table, was a thick white rug. To the left of the rug was a small chest of drawers on which stood several tiny glass animals. On the far right was a cheap, white-painted wardrobe. A large divan bed, covered by a shell-pink bedspread took up the remaining space.

Eve stood by the empty fireplace. Near her was a small armchair and a bedside table on which stood a reading lamp and several books.

She was wearing the same short-sleeved blue dressing gown and her face was wooden under careful make-up.

We looked at each other.

'Hello,' I said, smiling at her.

'Hello.' Her expression did not change nor did she move. It was a suspicious, indifferent greeting.

I stood looking at her, slightly embarrassed, puzzled that she showed no surprise at seeing me again and irritated about the dressing gown. But in spite of the hostile atmosphere, my blood moved fast through my veins.

'So we meet again,' I said a little lamely. 'Aren't you surprised to see me?'

She shook her head. 'No . . . I recognized your voice.'

'I bet you didn't,' I said. 'You're kidding.'

Her mouth pursed. 'I did . . . besides, I was expecting you.'

I must have shown my startled surprise because she suddenly laughed. The tension eased immediately.

'You were expecting me?' I repeated. 'Why?'

She looked away. 'Never mind.'

'But I do mind,' I insisted, walking round her and sitting in the armchair. I took out my cigarette case and offered it.

Her eyebrows went up, but she took a cigarette. 'Tha[illegible] she said. She hesitated, and then sat down on the bed n[illegible]

I also took a cigarette, thumped my lighter and as she leaned forward to light up, I said, 'Tell me why you were expecting me.'

She shook her head. 'I'm not going to.' She let smoke drift down her nostrils and she glanced uneasily round the room. She was on the defensive and I felt instinctively that she was nervous and unsure of herself.

I studied her for a few seconds. As soon as she felt my eyes on her face, she turned to look directly at me. 'Well?' she said sharply.

'It's a pity you make-up like that. It doesn't suit you.'

She stood up immediately and looked into the mirror over the fireplace. 'Why,' she asked, staring hard at herself. 'Don't I look all right?'

'Of course, but you'd look better without all that muck on your face. You don't need it.'

She continued to look at herself in the mirror. 'I'd look an awful fright without it,' she said, half to herself, then she turned and frowned at me.

'Did anyone tell you you're an interesting woman?' I asked, before she could speak. 'You have character and that's more than most women have.'

Her mouth tightened and she sat down. For a moment I had caught her off guard, but the wooden expression was now back again.

'You haven't come here to tell me I'm interesting, have you?'

I smiled at her. 'Why not? If no one has told you before, then it's time someone did. I like to give women their due.'

She flicked ash into the fireplace. It was a nervous, irritable movement and I could see she did not know what to make of me. As long as I could keep her in that frame of mind I held the initiative.

'Aren't you going to say sorry for this?' I asked, touching the bruise on my forehead.

She said what I expected her to say. 'Why should I? You deserved it.'

'I suppose I did,' I said and laughed. 'I'll have to be careful

next time. I like a woman with spirit. I'm sorry about the way I behaved, but I did want to see what your reactions would be.' I laughed again. 'I didn't expect to feel your reactions.'

She looked at me doubtfully, smiled and then said, 'I do get wild sometimes . . . but you deserved it.'

'Do you always treat men like that?'

She hedged. 'Like what?'

'Knocking them on the head if they annoy you.'

This time she giggled. 'Sometimes.'

'No hard feelings?'

'No.'

I watched her. She slouched as she sat, her head forward and her slim shoulders rounded. Again she looked sharply at me when she felt my eyes on her.

'Don't sit there looking at me,' she said irritably. 'Why did you come here?'

'I like looking at you,' I returned, relaxing in the armchair and feeling completely at ease. 'Can't I talk to you? Would that strike you as odd?'

She frowned. I could see she was in two minds. She did not know whether I was wasting her time or whether I was here professionally. It was obvious that she was controlling her impatience with difficulty.

'You have only come here to talk?' she said, looking at me and then immediately looking away. 'Isn't that a waste of time?'

'I don't think so. You interest me and besides I like talking to attractive women.'

She looked up at the ceiling with an exaggerated expression of exasperation. 'Oh they all say that,' she said impatiently.

That annoyed me. 'If you don't mind I would rather not be classed with an anonymous "they",' I said with acerbity.

She looked surprised. 'You have a very good opinion of yourself, haven't you?'

'Why not?' It was my turn to be impatient. 'After all, who'll believe in me if I don't?'

Her face darkened. 'I don't like conceited men.'

'Haven't you a good opinion of yourself?'

She shook her head emphatically. 'Why should I?'

'I hope you're not just another woman with an inferiority complex?'

'Do you know so many?'

'Quite a few. Is that what you suffer from?'

She stared into the empty fireplace, her expression suddenly moody. 'I suppose so.' Then she looked up suspiciously. 'Do you think that's funny?'

'Why should I? I think it's rather pathetic because there's no reason for you to.'

She raised her eyebrows questioningly. 'Why not?'

I knew then that she was unsure of herself and interested to know what I thought of her.

'You ought to be able to answer that if you are truthful about yourself. Now my first impressions of you . . . no, never mind, I don't think I'll tell you.'

'Come on,' she said, 'I want to know. What are your first impressions of me?'

I studied her as if I were making a careful assessment of her qualities. She stared back at me, frowning and ill at ease, but wanting to know. I had thought so much about her for the past two days that I was long past first impressions. 'If you really want to know,' I began with assumed reluctance, 'only I don't suppose you'll believe me.'

'Oh, come on,' she said impatiently, 'don't hedge.'

'All right. I'd say you are a woman of considerable character, independent to a degree, hot tempered and strong willed, extraordinarily attractive to men and, oddly enough, sensitive in your feelings.'

She studied me doubtfully. 'I wonder how many women you have said that to?' she asked, but I could see she was secretly pleased.

'Not many . . . none at all if you take it as a whole. I haven't met any one woman with all those qualities except yourself. But, of course, I really don't know you yet, do I? I may be entirely wrong . . . they're just first impressions.'

'Do you find me attractive?' She was in deadly earnest now.

'I would hardly be here if I didn't. Of course you're attractive.'

'But why? I'm not pretty.' She got up and looked in the mirror again. 'I think I look awful.'

'Oh no, you don't. You have character and personality. That's much better than insipid prettiness. There's something extraordinary about you. *Magnetic* is perhaps, the word.'

She folded her arms across her small, flat breasts. 'I think you're an awful liar,' she said, anger in her eyes. 'You don't really think I believe all this slop, do you? What exactly do you want? No one else comes here smarming over me like this.'

I laughed at her. 'Don't get angry. You know, I'm sorry for you. You certainly have a bad inferiority complex. Never mind, perhaps one day you'll believe me.' I leaned forward to examine the books on the beside table. There were copies of *Front Page Detective*, a shabby copy of Hemingway's *To Have and to Have Not*, and Thorne Smith's *Night Life of the Gods*. I thought they were an odd assortment.

'Do you read much?' I asked deliberately changing the subject.

'When I can find a good book,' she returned, bewildered.

'Have you ever read "Angels in Sables"?' I asked, naming my first book.

She moved restlessly to the dressing table. 'Yes . . . I didn't like it much.' She picked up a powder puff and dabbed at her chin.

'Didn't you?' I was disappointed. 'I wish you'd tell me why.'

She shrugged. 'Oh, I just didn't.'

She put down the powder puff, stared at herself in the mirror and then moved back to the fireplace. She was fidgety, impatient and a little bored.

'But you must have reasons. Did you find it dull?'

'I don't remember. I read so quickly I never remember anything I read.'

'I see . . . anyway you didn't like it.' I was irritated that she couldn't remember my book. I would have liked to have tal[illegible] to her about it and had her reactions, even if she did not li[illegible]

I began to realize that normal conversation with her was going to be difficult. Until we knew each other – and I was determined that we should know each other – topics of conversation were severely limited. Up to now, we had nothing in common.

She stood looking at me doubtfully and then sat down on the bed again. 'Well?' she said, abruptly. 'What now?'

'Tell me something about yourself.'

She shrugged and made a little grimace. 'There's nothing to tell.'

'Of course there is,' I said and leaning forward, I took her hand in mine. 'Are you married or is this a phoney?' I was twisting the thin gold wedding ring on her finger.

'I'm married.'

I was a little surprised. 'Is he nice?'

She looked away. 'Mmm-hmm.'

'Very *nice?*'

She took her hand away. 'Yes . . . very nice.'

'And where is he?'

Her head jerked round. 'That's not your business.'

I laughed at her. 'All right, don't get high hat. I must say when you get mad, you look quite impressive. How did you get those two lines above your nose?'

She was up instantly, looking at herself in the mirror. 'They're bad, aren't they?' she said, trying to smooth the furrows away with her finger tips.

I glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. I had been in the room exactly a quarter of an hour.

'Then you shouldn't frown so much,' I said, getting to my feet. 'Why don't you relax?'

I moved towards her and as I did so the puzzled, rather worried look went out of her eyes, instead, there came a look of confidence and secret amusement. She undid the cord of her dressing gown and her slender fingers went to the silk loop that held the one button that kept the dressing gown closed.

'I must go now,' I said looking pointedly at the clock.

Away went the look of confidence; her hands dropped to her sides. I was glad that I had decided not to meet her on her own

ground. So long as I behaved differently from the other men who visited her, I was certain to hold her attention and keep her puzzled.

'I'd like to talk to you about yourself when you have the time,' I said, smiling at her. 'I might be good for your inferiority complex.' As I passed the chest of drawers, I slid two ten dollar bills between the glass animals. One, a reproduction of Disney's Bambi, fell over on its side.

I saw her look quickly at the money and then she looked away. The sullen expression disappeared.

'Do you think I'll ever see you in anything but that dressing gown?' I asked at the door.

'You might,' she said, blankly. 'I do wear other things.'

'One of these days you must give me a treat. And don't forget, the next time I call, leave off the make-up. It doesn't suit you. Good-bye now,' and I opened the door.

She joined me. 'Thank you for the – the present,' she said, smiling. It was extraordinary how different she looked when she smiled.

'That's all right. By the way, my name's Clive. May I phone you soon?'

'Clive? But I know two Clives already.'

During the past quarter of an hour I had completely forgotten that she was anyone's woman and that remark jarred me badly. 'Well, I'm sorry. After all, it is my name. What do you suggest?'

She sensed my irritation and looked a little sullen. 'I like to know who's coming,' she said.

'Of course,' I said sarcastically. 'How about Clarence, or Lancelot or Archibald?'

She giggled and looked at me searchingly. 'It's all right. I'll recognize your voice. Good-bye, Clive.'

'Fine. I'll come and see you again soon.'

'Marty . . .' she called.

The big, angular woman came from an adjoining room and stood waiting, her hands clasped, a faint smirk in her eyes.

'I'll call you before long,' I said and foll[illegible] down the passage.

'Good evening, sir,' she said politely at the door.

I nodded and walked up the path to the white wooden gate. When I reached my car, I paused and looked back at the house. There were no lights to be seen. In the dusk of the evening, it looked just like any other of the little houses that dotted the side streets of Hollywood.

I started the engine and drove to a bar off Vine Street, within sight of the *Brown Derby*. I felt suddenly deflated and I needed a drink.

The Negro bartender grinned cheerfully at me, his teeth glistening like the keys of a piano in the hard electric light.

' 'Evening', sir,' he said, spreading his big hands on the bar. 'What'll it be tonight?'

I ordered a straight Scotch and carried it to a table away from the bar. There were only a few men in the place, none of them I knew. I was glad of that because I wanted to think. I relaxed in the easy chair, drank a little of the whisky and lit a cigarette.

I decided, after brooding for a while, that it had been an interesting, if expensive, quarter of an hour. The first opening move in the game had been mine. Eve had been puzzled and I t pretty sure, interested. I should have liked to have heard at she had said to Marty about me after I had left. She was smart enough to guess that I was playing some kind of a game, but I had given her no clue as to what it was.

I had made her curious. I had talked about her and not about myself; that must have been a change for her. The type of man she would mix with was certain to talk continuously about him-lf. Her inferiority complex was interesting. Possibly it was fear of the future. She wanted to be reassured about relied on her trade for money that would explain t her looks. She wasn't young. She wasn't old, cc if she were thirty-three, and I guessed she nt, in her game that was the age when a

lit a cigarette. In doing so I broke nd began, almost against my will, to

Obviously something had happened to me. A few days ago, the idea of my associating with a prostitute would have been unthinkable. I have always despised men who go with such women. Everything they stood for was repugnant to me. And yet, I had spent a quarter of an hour with one of these women, treating her as I treated my other women friends. I had actually left my car outside her house, which must be notorious in the neighbourhood, for anyone to identify and I had paid for the privilege of having a completely futile conversation.

It was my misfortune to associate with brilliant and talented people. I knew I was dross compared with them. But Eve had never known success. She had no talents and she was a social outcast. She was the only woman I knew whom I could genuinely patronize. In spite of her power over men, her strength of will and her cold indifference, she was for sale. As long as I had money I was her master. I realized now that it was essential for me to have such a companion, who was morally and socially my inferior, if I were not to lose all confidence in myself.

The more I thought about this, the clearer it became that I would have to leave Three Point. I was going to see a lot of Eve. Living so far from her would not simplify our meetings. Three Point would have to go.

I stubbed out my cigarette and walked over to the public telephone. I called my apartment.

Russell's voice floated over the line. 'Mr. Thurston's residence.'

'I'll be over some time tonight,' I told him. 'There's one thing I want you to do. You'll find one of my books, "Flowers for Madam" somewhere around. I want it sent immediately to Miss Eve Marlow by special messenger. No card and nothing to show who sent it.' I dictated the address. 'Will you do that?'

He said he would and I thought I detected a faint note of disapproval in his voice. He was fond of Carol and always disapproved of any other woman I knew. I hung up before he could express an opinion which he was quite capable of doing. Then I left the bar and walked over to the *Brown Derby*.

CHAPTER SIX

I FOUND Carol and Peter at a table away from the band. With them was a big, loosely built man in an immaculate tuxedo. He had a shock of iron-grey hair and his face was long and yellow with a thick loose underlip and a broad flattish nose. His grandfather could easily have been a lion.

Peter caught sight of me as I edged my way past the crowded tables. He rose to greet me. 'Hello there,' he said, looking surprised and pleased. 'So you made it after all. Look who's here, Carol. Have you had dinner?'

I took Carol's hand and smiled at her. 'No,' I said. 'May I join you?'

'Why, of course,' she said. 'I'm so glad you've come.'

Peter touched my arm. 'I don't think you've met Rex Gold,' he said. He turned to the lion man who was still drinking his soup with fixed attention. 'This is Clive Thurston, the author.'

So this was Rex Gold. Like everyone else in Hollywood, I had heard a lot about him and knew him to be the most powerful man in pictures.

'Glad to meet you, Mr. Gold,' I said.

Reluctantly, he gave over drinking his soup and half rose, offering a limp, boneless hand. 'Sit down, Mr. Thurston,' he said. His deep-set tawny eyes stared through me. 'You'll find the lobster soup excellent. Waiter!' He snapped his fingers impatiently. 'Lobster soup for Mr. Thurston.'

I winked at Carol as the waiter slid a chair under me. 'You see, I can't keep away from you,' I murmured to her.

'Didn't your publishers want to see you after all?' she whispered.

I shook my head. 'I phoned them instead.' Under the table I found and squeezed her hand. 'It turned out to be nothing important so I'm seeing them tomorrow. I wanted to be in on the celebration.'

While we were talking, Gold continued to spoon soup into his mouth, his eyes fixed in a glazed stare. It was obvious that he did not combine eating and talking.

'I wondered if you were going to see your wild woman,' Carol whispered mischievously, 'and that was the reason why you were passing me up.'

'I wouldn't pass you up for anyone,' I returned, trying to make my smile genuine. Carol had an uncanny knack of guessing the truth as far as I was concerned.

'What are you two whispering about?' Peter asked.

'Secrets,' Carol replied swiftly. 'Don't be inquisitive, Peter.'

Gold finished his soup and dropped his spoon with a rattle. Then he scowled round for a waiter. 'Where's Mr. Thurston's soup and what's coming next?' he called as a waiter came scurrying up. As soon as he was satisfied that neither he nor I were forgotten, he turned to Carol, 'Are you coming to the club tonight?' he asked.

'For a little while,' Carol said. 'But I don't want to be too late. I've so much to do tomorrow.'

The waiter brought me the soup.

'You should always let tomorrow take care of itself,' Gold said, his eyes intent on my soup. I had a vague feeling that he would willingly take it from me and drink it if I gave him any encouragement. The feeling embarrassed me. 'You must learn to play as well as work,' he went on. 'You can't divorce the two satisfactorily.'

Carol shook her head. 'I need my seven hours' sleep, especially now.'

'That reminds me,' Gold pursed his heavy lips. 'Imgram will be at my office tomorrow morning. I'd like you to meet him.' He was speaking now to Peter.

'Of course,' Peter said. 'Will he have much to do with the scenario?'

'No. If he is difficult to handle, just let me know.' Gold looked suddenly at me. 'Have you written for the screen, Mr. Thurston?'

'No . . . not yet,' I returned. 'I've a number of ideas I'm going to work out when I have the time . . .'

'Ideas? What ideas?' His face hung over the table as he hunched forward. 'Anything I could use?'

I searched my mind frantically for a discarded plot that might be of use to him, but I could not think of anything. 'There must be,' I said, deciding to bluff. 'I'll let you see some of them if you're interested.'

I felt his eyes boring into me like drills. 'See what? I don't understand.'

'Treatments,' I said, feeling suddenly hot and irritated. 'As soon as I've time to dope out some treatments I'll let you see them.'

He stared blankly over at Carol. She was crumbling bread casually and did not look up. 'Treatments?' he repeated. 'I'm not interested in treatments. I want a story. You're an author, aren't you? All I want you to do is tell me a story . . . tell me one now. You say you've ideas. All right, tell me one.'

I wished I had not sat down at that table. I felt Peter eyeing me curiously. Carol still crumbled bread, but there was a faint flush on her face. Gold continued to stare at me while he stroked his loose jowls with his fleshy hand.

'I can't talk here,' I said. 'If you're really interested, perhaps I could come and see you.'

Just then several waiters closed in on us and began to serve the next course. Gold immediately lost interest in me and began to badger the waiters. Everything had to be just right even to the exact temperature of the plate on which his meal was served. For several minutes there was a feverish stir of activity round the table. Finally, he was satisfied and began to eat wolfishly as if he hadn't had a meal for several days.

Peter caught my blank look and grinned faintly. There seemed no point in attempting to make conversation while Gold was eating. Neither Carol nor Peter made any effort and I decided to follow their example. We all ate in silence. I wondered if, when he had finished his dinner, Gold would come back to his request for a story. Somehow I didn't think he would. In a way I was angry with myself for letting the opportunity slip, but as I had nothing to tell him, I decided to be thankful for the interruption.

The moment Gold finished eating, he pushed his plate impatiently away and took a toothpick from his vest pocket. He thoughtfully probed his teeth while he looked round the crowded room.

'Did you read Clive's book, *Angels in Sables?*' Carol asked suddenly.

Gold frowned. 'I never read anything,' he said shortly; 'you know that.'

'Then I think you ought to. The plot's not suitable for a picture, but the idea behind it is.'

This was news to me and I looked sharply at her. She studiously ignored me.

'What idea?' His yellow face showed interest.

'Why men prefer wantons,' Carol replied.

I was taken aback because I had no recollection of such a situation in *Angels in Sables*.

'Do they?' Peter asked softly.

'Of course they do,' Gold said, snapping his toothpick between his fingers. 'She's right. And I'll tell you why. They prefer them because a good woman is so tedious.'

Carol shook her head. 'I don't think so, do you, Clive?'

I didn't know what to say. I hadn't thought about it. Then Eve came to my mind. I thought of her and Carol. Eve was a wanton. While Carol was good in the sense that she was reliable, sincere, honest and lived by a code of sound ethics, I doubted if Eve even knew what ethics meant. This was as good a comparison as any. I had left Carol, lied to her even, to have a few minutes with Eve. Why had I done that? If I could answer that, I could answer Carol.

'A wanton has some qualities which a good woman lacks,' I said slowly. 'Those qualities – they're not necessarily good ones – appeal to the primitive instinct in man. Men lag behind women in controlling their instincts and as long as women have better control, so will men go after wantons. All the same, a man doesn't want a wanton for any length of time. She's here today and gone tomorrow.'

Carol said sharply, 'Absolute rubbish, Clive, and you know it.'

I looked blankly at her. There was an expression in her eyes

that I hadn't seen before. She was hurt, angry and ready for a fight.

'I don't disagree with Mr Thurston myself,' Gold said complacently. He took a large cigar from his case and examined it thoughtfully. 'Men's instincts are important.'

'They have nothing to do with it,' Carol snapped. 'I'll tell you why men prefer wantons.' She glanced over at Peter as if to exclude him from the conversation. 'I'm talking now about the majority of men who, if they are let off the lead, rush off and behave like promiscuous puppies. I've no quarrel with the minority of men who have set themselves a standard of moral behaviour and refuse to depart from it.'

'My dear Carol,' I protested, realizing that this could easily be a personal attack. 'You ought to be in a pulpit.'

'She'd look charming in a pulpit,' Gold said, handing his cigar to a waiter to pierce. 'Let her go on.'

'A man prefers a wanton because he is vain,' Carol said, speaking directly at me. 'A wanton is usually decorative. She is sophisticated and glamorous. *Men like to be seen with that* kind of woman because their friends envy them . . . the poor saps. A wanton is usually without brains. She doesn't need them, of course. All she needs is a pretty face, a nice pair of legs, smart clothes and willingness.'

'You think men are more at their ease if women haven't brains?' Gold asked.

'You know they are, R.G.,' Carol said shortly. 'Don't think you can pull wool over my eyes. You're as bad as any of them.'

Gold's yellow face softened into a smile. 'Go on,' he said. 'You haven't finished, have you?'

'It makes me tired to see the worthless women men drag around with them. That's all most men think of . . . looks, dress and bodies. A girl who hasn't looks is nowhere in Hollywood. It is disgusting.'

'Never mind that. Keep to wantons,' Peter said, his eyes alight with interest.

'All right . . . wantons. A man dislikes his woman to know more than he does. That's where a wanton scores. She's lazy by

nature and she's no time to be anything else but wanton. She has no other subject to talk about but herself, her clothes, her troubles and, of course, her looks. Man likes that. He has no competition. If he wants to, he can be patronizing. He's a little tin god to himself, although, the wanton probably thinks he's a bore. All she's after is a good time and what she can get out of him.'

'Very interesting,' Gold said, 'But where is the picture idea? I don't see it.'

'A satire on men,' Carol said. ' "Angles in Sables" is a grand title. Never mind about Clive's plot. Use the title, and let him write a hundred per cent satire about men. Think how the women would eat it . . . after all, women are our public.'

Gold glanced across at me. 'What do you say?'

I was staring at Carol. She had given me an idea. She had done more than that. She had fired my imagination which had been dead since I wrote my last book. I knew now what I was going to do. It had come in a flash. I was going to write the story of Eve. I was going to capture her warped, odd personality and put it on the screen.

'It's good,' I said, excitedly. 'Yes, I know I can do it!'

Carol looked at me and suddenly bit her lip. Our eyes met and I knew she had sensed what I was going to do. I looked quickly away and went on to Gold, 'As Carol says it's a great title and a great subject . . .'

Carol pushed back her chair. 'Would you mind if I run away?' she said abruptly. 'I've developed an awful head. It's been coming on all the evening . . .'

Peter was at her side before I could even stand up.

'You've been working too hard, Carol,' he said. 'R.G. will excuse you . . . won't you.'

The tawny eyes had gone sleepy again. 'Go to bed,' he said a little curtly. 'Mr. Thurston and I will stay here. See her home, Peter.'

I stood up. 'I'm seeing her home,' I said, feeling angry and a little frightened. 'Come on, Carol . . .'

She shook her head. 'Stay with Mr. Gold,' she said, without looking at me. 'Peter, I want to go home.'

As she turned away I put my hand on her arm. 'What's wrong?' I asked, trying to keep my voice. 'Is it something I said?'

She looked steadily at me. The hurt, angry look was still in her eyes. 'I just want to say good night to you now, Clive. Will you please understand?'

She knows, I thought, she knows everything. There's nothing I can keep from her. She sees through me as if I were made of glass.

There was an awkward pause. Gold stared down at his fleshly hands, a frown on his heavy face. Peter picked up Carol's ermine cape and stood, uneasily waiting.

'Of course,' I said, surprised that my voice sounded so harsh, 'if it's like that.'

She tried to smile. 'It is rather like that. Good night, Clive.'

'Good night,' I said.

'I'll see you at the club, R.G.' Peter waved and they went away together.

I sat down at the table again.

Gold regarded the white ash of his cigar thoughtfully.

'Women are odd, aren't they?' he said. 'Of course, you mean something to each other?'

I did not feel like discussing Carol with a comparative stranger. 'We've known each other some time,' I said flatly.

His thick lips pursed and his eyebrows came down. 'That idea of hers is good. A satire about men. Angels in Sables. It's box office.' He closed his eyes and brooded. 'What's your angle?'

'A portrait of a wanton,' I said, leaning back in my chair, my mind divided between Carol and Eve. 'The men who pass through her hands, the power she exerts and her ultimate conversion.'

'Who would convert her?' Gold asked casually.

'A man . . . someone who is stronger than she.'

Gold shook his head. 'That's bad psychology. Carol would tell you that. If your character's a genuine wanton, then only another woman could convert her.'

'I don't agree,' I said stubbornly. 'A man could do it. If a wanton could be made to love, then I believe the barriers would come down and you could do anything with her.'

He touched off his cigar ash onto a plate. 'I don't think you and I are thinking along the same lines,' he said. 'Describe to me your idea of a wanton.'

'I'll describe the wanton I have in mind. She's the only one I could be interested in because I know her. She is real and I can study her.'

'Go on.' Smoke curled from his lips and partly obscured his face.

'The woman I'm thinking of lives on men. She is pitilessly selfish and very experienced. She is anti-social, amoral and interested only in herself. Men mean nothing to her except for the money they give her.' I ground my cigarette butt into the ash tray. 'That is my wanton.'

'Interesting,' Gold said, 'but too difficult. You don't know what you're talking about. A woman like that could never love. She would have lost the feeling for love.' He glanced up and looked at me fixedly. 'You say you know such a woman?'

'I've met her. I can't say I really know her, but I'm going to.'

'You are experimenting with her?'

I was unwilling to tell him too much. He might talk to Carol.

'Only from the point of view of writing about her,' I said carelessly. 'I have to mix with all kinds of people in my game.'

'I see.' His lips closed wetly over his cigar. 'You weren't thinking of persuading this woman to fall in love with you?'

I eyed him. 'I've something better to do with my time,' I said, a little sharply.

'Don't misunderstand me,' he said, fairly waving his hands. 'You said this woman was the character you have chosen for your theme. You also said if she could be made to love then you could do anything with her? Isn't that so?'

I nodded.

'Then how can you be sure that you are psychologically

right, unless you actually experiment? I don't think you are. I think such a woman as you have described is beyond the feeling of love. That is to me sound reasoning, while you are merely theorizing.'

I sat back in my chair. I suddenly saw the trap he had laid for me. I had either to back out or else admit what I was planning to do.

'Now wait,' Gold said, 'Don't say anything. Let me talk first. It is always better to know all the facts before you commit yourself.' He waved to a waiter. 'We'll have a little brandy. I find brandy is very good for this kind of conversation.'

When the brandy had been ordered, he sunk his head into his shoulders and hunched over the table. 'I'm interested,' he said. 'I like "Angels in Sables". I like the idea of a satire about men. I haven't made a psychological picture for a very long time. They are good box office. Women like them. Carol was right when she said women are our public.' He fumbled inside his coat and took out a cigar-case. 'Have a cigar, Mr. Thurston?'

I took the long cigar although I really didn't want it. Something, however, told me that Gold didn't offer cigars to anyone but those he favoured.

'That cigar cost me five dollars,' he said. 'I have them specially made for me. You'll enjoy it.'

The brandy came and he sniffed at the balloon-shaped glass and sighed. 'Excellent,' he murmured and held the glass cupped in both hands.

I was in no hurry. I cut the end of the cigar carefully and lit it. It was smooth, mild and satisfying.

'I am interested,' Gold went on, 'in a story based on facts. I like the idea of your modelling your character on someone you know. She sounds right. You will obviously bring her to life because she is already alive. All you have to do is to capture her likeness and put it on paper. I should like you to take a further step. I would like you to put yourself in your hero's place and, before you write, go through the experiences you have planned for your hero.'

'Now look, Mr. Gold . . .' I began, but he raised his hand.

'Let me go on. Hear what I have to say first. You may find

that your ideas won't work out the way you think they will. But, that won't matter, the result will be psychologically right. You are a man of the world. I imagine that you have had considerable success with women in the past. This woman you have chosen as the subject for a story would be a worthy opponent, wouldn't she? Why don't you make her fall in love with you? It would be a very interesting experiment.'

I didn't say anything. He was suggesting the very thing I had planned to do. All the same it made me uneasy because I had Carol at the back of my mind.

'I would buy such a story, Mr. Thurston,' Gold went on quietly. 'Whichever way it turned out it would be interesting. The experiment would be between you and me and, of course, the woman in question. No one else need know about it.'

We looked at each other and I knew he realized that I was uneasy about Carol.

'I'll admit the idea had crossed my mind,' I said. 'But dealing so intimately with a woman of that reputation is a little tricky.'

A flicker of a smile appeared in Gold's eyes. I had an uncomfortable feeling that he saw through me. 'Then you'll do it?' he said, raising his eyebrows.

'Yes, as a business proposition, I'll do it,' I said. 'But I don't want to waste my time unless I receive some kind of compensation.'

'Tell me the story in a few words.'

I thought for a moment. 'This will be the story of a successful wanton who preys on men. I will handle all the background stuff of her relations with men so that Hays won't kill it. The only thing we need really stress is that she takes money and presents from men who are infatuated with her. Then an entirely different type of man comes into her life, and this is where the drama really begins. At first, like the other men, he falls for her, but as he gets to know her, he realizes what a cheat she is and decides to play her at her own game. He does and he beats her in the end. Then tired of the game, he leaves her and goes off to hunt elsewhere. I see it as a Scarlet O'Hara and Reith Butler set-up.'

'And you really think it will work out that way?' Gold asked, pointedly disbelieving.

'Certainly. It's a question of the stronger will.'

Gold shook his head. 'Providing your woman is as bad as the one you have described, I am sure it will not work out that way.'

'Well, let us experiment and see. As you say, whatever the result, it should make an interesting script.'

Gold brooded. 'Yes, I think it will. All right, do it. I will pay you two thousand dollars for the treatment. If it is what I want then I will pay a further fifty thousand for a complete shooting script. You can have all the help you want from the Studios, but, of course, you can please yourself about that.'

I suppressed my excitement with difficulty. 'May I have that offer in writing?'

'Certainly. I will tell my people to get in touch with you.'

'Will you wait three months? If I don't succeed in three months, it won't be worth wasting any more time.'

He nodded. 'Three months then. It will be an interesting experiment in real life. You should have quite an exciting time before you.' He signalled a waiter. 'And now I must go to the club. Won't you join me, Mr. Thurston?'

I shook my head. 'I'd rather not, thank you. You've given me quite a lot to think about and I have plans to make.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

I DID not see Carol for the next two weeks. I telephoned each morning and evening, but I was told that she was either at the Studio or at Mr. Gold's house. I did not know whether she was avoiding me or whether she was really busy with her script. If it had not been for the way she had walked out on me, I should not have given it another thought. She often disappeared for a week or so when she was working hard, but, now I was worried. I remember the look in her eyes when she had said, 'It is rather like that.' For the first time in two years, I knew I had hurt and angered her.

I could, of course, have gone to the Studio, but first, I wanted to talk to her on the telephone where she could not watch me while I talked. As I have already said, she was very difficult to lie to. If I were to convince her that there was nothing between Eve and myself, I would have to handle the situation with care. So I continued to the Studio.

I had settled in my apartment much to Russell's annoyance. He had hopefully believed that I would stay at Three Point for at least another month. I thought a lot about Eve. On the third night after our meeting I drove over to Laurel Canyon Drive and passed her house. There were no lights showing and I did not stop; but it gave me an odd feeling of satisfaction just to have seen the house again.

On the fourth day, immediately after lunch, I called her.

The maid Marty answered. When I asked for Eve, she wanted to know who was calling.

After a moment's hesitation, I said, 'Mr. Clive.'

'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'Miss Marlow's engaged right now. Can I take a message?'

'It's all right,' I said. 'I'll call later.'

'She won't be long,' she said. 'I'll tell her you called.'

I thanked her and hung up. I sat holding the telephone for

several minutes, then I put it on the table with a little grimace. Why was I feeling bad? I asked myself. I knew what she was, didn't I? I did not ring her again that day and I did no work. I thought about Gold and I tried to work out a blue print for the script we had discussed. But I was not successful. Until I knew Eve better, I would not hope to make much progress.

I must have been a trial to Russell as he was used to my going out and leaving him the apartment to himself. I spent the rest of the day wandering between the large lounge, my bedroom and my small library. I had a date with Clare Jacoby, the singer, in the evening, and although I did not feel like listening to her incessant chatter, I could not very well put her off. I returned to the apartment just after midnight, a little drunk and irritable.

Russell was waiting up for me and after he had brought me a whiskey I sent him to bed. Then I telephoned Eve. I sat listening to the steady burr-burr of the bell, but there was no answer. I slammed down the receiver and went into my bedroom to undress. In pyjamas and dressing gown, I returned to the lounge and called her again. It was now twenty to one.

'Hello,' she said.

'Hello yourself.' I found my mouth had gone dry at the sound of her voice.

'You are very late, Clive.'

She said she would recognize my voice, but I didn't think she would. That was one score for her.

'How are you?' I settled back in my armchair.

'All right,' she said.

I waited, expecting her to say something else, but the line was silent. This was my first experience of the many unsatisfactory telephone calls I was to have with her, so I had no warning that her replies would be non-committal and monosyllabic.

'Hello?' I said, after waiting a moment. 'Are you still there?'

'Yes.' Her voice sounded remote and flat.

'I thought we were cut off.' I settled back in my chair again. 'Did you like the book I sent you?'

There was a long pause, then I heard her say something as if she were speaking to someone with her.

'What was that?' I asked.

'I can't talk now,' she said. 'I'm engaged.'

A wild, unreasonable rage surged through me. 'Good God!' I exclaimed. 'Do you work all night as well as all day?' But I was talking to a dead telephone. She had hung up.

I sat thinking for almost an hour. It began to dawn on me that Eve was going to be an even harder proposition than I had first thought. In fact, as I brooded about her and Gold's offer, I experienced a slight feeling of panic. It was four days since I had seen her and I had not even scratched the surface. The fact that she had hung up on me like that showed that she was not yet interested in me. She did not even say that she was sorry. 'I can't talk now, I'm engaged,' and down had gone the receiver. I clenched my fists.

In spite of my anger, her indifference made me all the more anxious to see her. During those two weeks that I saw nothing of Carol, I visited Eve three times. There is no point in recording those three meetings. They ran practically parallel with the previous meeting. We talked uneasily about the merest trifles and at the end of a quarter of an hour I left, being careful always to put two twenty dollar bills on the chest of drawers. Each time I called on her I brought her a book for which she seemed genuinely grateful. Although I tried to break down her reserve she remained wooden and suspicious. I realized that if I was to get anywhere with her I would have to try more forceful tactics. Finally I decided on my line of action.

The following morning I came down to the dining room to find Russell waiting to serve breakfast. It was now ten days since I had seen Carol and I knew that Russell was worried about this. I could tell that by his continuous disapproving looks.

'You might put a call through to Miss Carol,' I said, as I flipped through my letters, 'and see what she's doing. If she's at home I'll speak to her.'

While he was making the call, I glanced at the headlines of the newspaper. There was nothing there to interest me and I dropped the paper on the floor.

Russell, after murmuring into the telephone, hung up and shook his head. 'She's out, sir,' he said, his round, fat face sagging with gloom. 'Why don't you slip down to the Studio and see her?

'I'm too busy to slip down to the Studio,' I said shortly, 'And what business is it of yours anyway?'

He stood opposite me, moving the toast within my reach. 'Miss Carol's a nice young lady,' he said, 'and I don't like to see her treated badly, Mr. Clive.'

'So you think I'm treating Miss Carol badly, do you?' I said, spreading butter on my toast and avoiding his disapproving glance.

'I do, sir. I think you should see her. She's a nice young lady and she deserves to receive better treatment than the other young ladies you know.'

'You are poking your nose as usual into something that does not concern you. Miss Carol is extremely busy and has no time at the moment to be sociable. I'm not neglecting her and, if you will remember, I call her twice a day and have been doing so for the past two weeks.'

'Then, all I can say, sir, is she's avoiding you,' he returned obstinately. 'You shouldn't allow it.'

'I think you'd better do my bedroom now, Russell,' I said coldly. 'I have everything I want at the moment.

'This Miss Marlow, sir,' he said, 'She's a professional lady, isn't she?'

I stared at him in amazement. 'And how did you know that?'

An almost pious look settled on his face. 'Being a gentleman's man, sir,' he said, a little pompously, 'I feel it is part of my duties to know something of the worldly aspects of life. The name, sir, if I may presume, is a little obvious.'

'You think so, do you?' I said, trying not to smile. 'And what if she is?'

His bushy white eyebrows crawled to the top of his head. 'I can only warn you, Mr. Clive. That sort of woman never did anyone any good. And if I may say so, any attempt to establish a social relationship with her would be fraught with disaster.'

'Do stop talking like a drip and get upstairs,' I said, feeling

this had gone far enough. 'I am meeting Miss Marlow to get a background for a picture. Mr. Gold's commissioned me to write it.'

'I'm surprised to hear that, sir. I always understood Mr. Gold was a person of intelligence. No one in his right senses would consider making a picture in connection with that subject. If you will excuse me, I will do your room.'

I watched his dignified exit rather thoughtfully. On the face of it, he was right, yet Gold had definitely promised to do the story. I picked up my letters again and opened them, hopefully looking for a letter from the Studio. It was not here and I realized it was perhaps a little early to expect it. I went over to my desk and checked my bank balance. I was surprised to find it so low. After a moment's hesitation, I tossed the bills into the trash basket. They would have to wait for payment. Then I called Merle Bensinger, my agent.

'Look, Merle,' I said, as soon as she came on the line, 'what's happening to "Rain Check"? I haven't had this week's receipts.

'I was writing to you about that, Clive,' she returned. Merle had a bright metallic voice which I always found a little overpowering on the telephone. 'The cast has been given a week off. I think they deserve it, the poor dears. They've been at it now for twenty weeks.'

'So while they disport themselves, I'm supposed to starve?' I said crossly. 'Isn't there anything else coming in? How about my books?'

'You know there's nothing until September, Clive.' She sounded startled. 'Sellick's don't make up their accounts until September . . .'

'I know – I know,' I said sharply. 'Well, if you can't do anything for me, Merele, at least listen to my news. Gold's offered me a contract. I ought to have told you before. I outlined a story to him a couple of weeks ago and he's offering fifty thousand dollars for it.'

'Why, that's wonderful.' Her voice sounded even brighter and more metallic. 'Do you want me to look after the arrangements?'

'I suppose so,' I said, a little doubtfully. Ten per cent meant parting with five thousand dollars, but Merle did know her job and if Gold was going to try a double cross, she would know how to handle him. 'Yes, you'd better look after it. I'll send you the correspondence when I get it.'

'How's the new book going?'

'Never mind about the new book. I've got Gold on my mind right now.'

'But, Clive,' her voice signalled alarm, 'Sellick's are expecting it by the end of the month.'

'Then they'll have to expect it,' I returned. 'I tell you I'm busy.'

There was a pause, then she said, 'But haven't you begun it yet?'

'No, I haven't. To hell with Sellick's. I'm after Gold's fifty thousand.'

'I shall have to tell Mr. Sellick. He'll be very disappointed. They've advertised it, you know, Clive.'

'Tell whom you like. I couldn't care less. Tell the President if it'll make you feel any better, but for God's sake, Merle, don't bother me with Sellick's headaches,' I snapped, feeling suddenly irritated with her. 'Isn't Gold a better proposition?'

'The money's better, of course,' she said slowly, 'but, its some time since you wrote a book and you must think of your name.'

'I'll look after that,' I assured her. 'Don't worry about my name.

She remembered something. 'Oh, Clive,' she said, 'I've an offer from the Digest. They want an article on the "Women of Hollywood". Three thousand dollars. Fifteen hundred words. Would you like to do it for them?'

It wasn't often Merle put anything in my way. I was pleased. 'Sure,' I said. 'When do you want it?'

'Can you do it today? I've been holding it and it's urgent now.'

That rather spoiled the offer. What she really meant was she had been trying to get someone to write it and had so far failed. 'Well, all right. Leave it with me. I'll get Russell to bring it

over first thing tomorrow morning.' I said good-bye and hung up.

Russell came in just then to clear the breakfast things.

'I have an article to do for the Digest,' I said. 'Have I any dates today?'

Russell liked to be consulted about my appointments. 'You promised to see Miss Selby at three, sir,' he said. 'And you're dining with Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wilbur tonight.'

'Well, Miss Selby isn't important. She's a damn little nuisance anyway. Tell her I've had to go out of town. If I have the afternoon to myself I should be able to manage. I'll dine with the Wilburs.'

I left him pottering about the living room and went upstairs to dress. By the time I was through it was twenty to twelve. It was time to ring Eve.

The bell rang for quite a while before she answered. She sounded sleepy.

'Hello there,' I said. 'Did I get you out of bed?'

'You did, Clive,' she said. 'I was fast asleep.'

'Well, I'm sorry, but look at the time. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

'I never get up before twelve. You ought to know that by now.'

Well, anyway, she was at least stringing some sentences together for a change.

I drew a deep breath. 'Eve,' I said, 'you wouldn't like to spend a week-end with me, would you?'

There was a long pause, then she said in a flat, indifferent voice. 'If that's what you want.'

'We might take in a theatre. How about this week-end?'

'All right.'

If she should only sound just a little enthusiastic, I thought angrily. 'Fine,' I said, keeping the disappointment out of my voice. 'Where would you like to dine?'

'I'll leave it to you.' There was a pause and then she said, 'But it mustn't be ...' and she ran through a bewildering number of restaurants and hotels which left me gasping.

'But there's nothing to choose from after that little lot's been

eliminated,' I protested. 'For instance, why on earth can't we go to the Brown Derby?'

'I just can't,' she said. I could imagine the two furrows above the bridge of her nose deepening. 'Or any of the other places I've told you.'

'Well, all right,' I said, feeling that if I pressed her she would refuse to go altogether. 'I'll send you a line. Then we definitely meet on Saturday?'

'All right,' and down went the receiver before I could say how pleased I was.

CHAPTER EIGHT

As I drove round the corner of Fairfax and Beverley I saw a big crowd ahead. The boulevard was blocked with cars and people. It looked as if there had been an accident so I pulled into the curb and waited; but the crowd increased.

I said, 'Hell!' and jumped out of my car and went to see what it was all about.

A small roadster was crossways in the street; one of its front fenders was crumped up. Four men were pushing a big Packard over to the curb; it had a broken headlight and lot of scratches on its immaculate body and a flat tyre.

Peter Tennett stood in the middle of the group of arguing men. He was speaking to an elderly man, and I could see he was worried and angry.

'Hello there, Peter,' I said, shouldering my way through the crowd. 'Anything I can do?'

His face brightened when he saw me. 'Got your car with you, Clive?' he asked hopefully.

'Sure,' I said. 'It's parked over there. What happened?'

He waved his hand at the Packard. 'I was pulling from the curb when our friend here cut across and hit me head on.'

The elderly man muttered something about his brakes. He looked white and scared.

Just then there came the wail of a police siren and a radio car pulled up. A big red-faced policeman got out and pushed his way through the crowd.

He recognized Peter. 'What's the matter, Mr. Tennett?' he demanded.

'I got clipped,' Peter said, 'but I don't want any trouble. I'm satisfied if this gentleman is.'

The policeman looked coldly at the elderly man, 'Well, if Mr. Tennett's satisfied, I am. Do you want to make anything of it?'

The elderly man backed away. 'It's all right with me, officer.'

Peter looked at his watch. 'Will you take care of this, officer?' he said. 'I'm late for the Studio as it is.'

The policeman nodded. 'That's okay, Mr. Tennett. I'll call the Studio garage for you.'

Peter thanked him and then joined me. 'Can you run me over to the Studio, or will it be out of your way?'

'Glad to,' I said, pushing through the crowd. 'You're sure you're all right?'

Peter laughed. 'Yes, but the old fellow looks bad. I hope they take care of him.'

I heard a girl who was standing nearby say to a little blonde with a bicycle, 'That's Peter Tennett, the director.'

I glanced at Peter with a grin, but he hadn't heard.

When we were driving towards the Studio, Peter said, 'Where've you been, Clive? I haven't seen you for days.'

'I've been around,' I said. 'How's the picture going?'

Peter lifted his hands expressively. 'We're getting down to it,' he said. 'The first few weeks are always the worst. It's too early yet to say what's going to happen.' He waved casually to Corrine Moreland, the movie star, as she passed us in a cream roadster. 'I've been meaning to ring you, Clive. I'm damn pleased you're working for R.G.'

I glanced at him quickly. 'He told you?'

'He said he wanted you to get an angle on this idea of Carol's, but he didn't give me any details. What's behind it?'

I hedged. 'I'm working on it now,' I said. 'It's going to be a satire on men. I can't tell you anything else because it's still up in the air.'

'But is there anything really in it? R.G. usually talks to me about his plots, only this time he's gone mysterious on me.'

'As soon as I've anything to show you.' I said, 'I'll let you in on it.'

I slowed down before the Studio gates. The guard opened up and touched his cap to Peter as we drove through.

'You sure I'm not taking you out of your way?' Peter said as I crawled along the palm edged drive to the Studio offices.

'I'll drop you just here if you don't mind,' I said, pulling up. 'I've a whale of a lot of work . . .' and I stopped because Carol was standing by my side. 'Why, hello, stranger,' I went on, taking off my hat and smiling at her.

She was wearing a dark brown shirt and brick red slacks. Round her hair she wore a flame coloured turban. She looked smart, neat and picturesque.

'Hello, Clive.' Her dark eyes were wide and serious. 'Have you come to see me?'

'It's time, isn't it?' I opened the car door and got out. 'Do you know I've been ringing you twice a day?'

Peter broke in. 'I'll leave you two. Thanks, Clive, for pulling me out of that mess.' He waved and disappeared into the vast glass and wooden building that housed the Studio offices.

Carol suddenly put her hand in mine. 'I'm sorry, Clive,' she said with a rush. 'I've been angry with you.'

'I know,' I said, thinking how lovely she looked. 'I deserved it. Let's go somewhere and talk. I've missed you.'

'I've missed you too.' She slipped her arm through mine. 'Let's go to my room, we can talk there.'

As we moved towards the building, a call boy came running out. 'Miss Rae,' he said, a little breathlessly. 'Mr. Highams wants you right away.'

Carol snapped her fingers. 'Oh, Clive, what a bore. But come with me. I want you to meet Mr. Imgram.'

I hung back. 'You don't want me around, Carol,' I said. 'You're busy now, aren't you?'

She pulled at my arm. 'Its time you met the fellows,' she said severely: 'Jerry Highams is an important person. He's our production chief and you ought to meet him.'

I allowed myself to be persuaded and followed her through the endless maze of wide passages until we reached a polished mahogany door on which was written in neat black letters *Jerry Highams*.

Carol went straight in.

Peter was sitting in an armchair with a mass of papers in a leather bound folder on his knees. By the window was a big fat man with hair like straw and tobacco ash all over his white an

yellow sweater. He turned as we entered. I noticed his slate grey eyes. They were humourous, sharp and penetrating.

'Jerry, this is Clive Thurston who wrote "Angels in Sables" and the play "Rain Check",' Carol said.

He looked swiftly at me and I could feel his eyes probing inside my skull. He took his hands out of his trouser pockets and came over. 'I've been hearing about you,' he said, shaking hands, 'R.G. was saying you were working on a script for him.'

Gold seemed to be generally advertising me. I didn't know whether to be pleased or not.

'Sit down. Have a cigarette,' Highams went on, waving me to a chair. 'What's the angle on this script? R.G.'s acting mysterious.'

'She'll tell you,' I said waving to Carol. 'After all, it was her idea.'

'Her idea?' Highams' face brightened. 'Was it, Carol?'

'Well I did suggest that Clive should write a satire on men and use his title "Angels in Sables".'

Highams shifted his attention to me again. 'Are you doing that?'

I nodded. 'That's the idea.'

'Well, that isn't so bad.' He looked hopefully over at Peter.

'The idea's right, and if Clive turns in a script like "Heaven Must Wait", it'll be terrific,' Peter said, putting the folder on the desk.

'Then why's R.G. being cagey?' Highams demanded.

'It's time he put one over you,' Carol laughed. 'Maybe he knows it's good and wants to surprise you.'

Highams stroked his chin. 'It could be that.' He wagged his finger at me. 'Now look, friend,' he said, 'I want you to get this straight. The people who'll make your picture'll be Peter and me . . . not Gold. Before you turn your treatment over to Gold, let me see it. I'll help you in any way I can. I know what we can do and what we can't do. Gold doesn't. And if Gold doesn't like a treatment, he'll kill it. Let me see the treatment first and I'll vet it for you. You have a good idea to work on. Don't spoil it and don't listen to Gold. Okay?'

I nodded. 'Okay.'

I felt that I could trust him. He was sincere, and if he said he would help, I was sure he would without expecting anything in return.

A knock came on the door and when Highams called out, a thin little man, in a shabby suit edged cautiously round the door.

'Am I late?' he asked, looking at Highams anxiously.

'Why, come in,' Highams said, going over to him. 'No, you're all right. This is Clive Thurston. Thurston meet Frank Imgram.'

I could scarcely believe that this insignificant little man was the author of *The Land is Barren*, the book every film company had fought for, and which, it was rumoured, Gold had finally bought for 250,000 dollars.

I got to my feet and offered my hand. 'Glad to meet you, Mr. Imgram,' I said, looking with interest at his pale, sensitive face.

He had large protruding blue eyes, a big forehead and thin, mouse coloured hair.

He looked at me searchingly, smiled nervously and turned back to Highams. 'I'm sure Mr. Gold is wrong,' he said, with a kind of feverish anxiety. 'I've thought about it all this morning. Helen can't be in love with Lancing. It's too ridiculous. She could never have any feeling for such a complex character as Lancing. It's simply pandering to the happy ending.'

Highams shook his head. 'Don't worry,' he said, soothingly. 'I'll talk to R.G.' He looked over at Carol.

'You had an angle, didn't you?'

Imgram went to her eagerly. 'I'm sure you'll agree that I'm right,' he said. 'You've agreed with me up to now. Can't you see how impossible it would be?'

'Of course,' Carol said gently. 'The theme's so big I'm sure we could let the ending stand. Don't you think, Peter?'

'Yes, but you know what R.G. is about that kind of an ending.' Peter looked worried.

I felt out of this. 'Look,' I said, 'I'll leave you to it . . .'

Imgram immediately turned to me. 'I'm so sorry,' he said.

'You see, I have so little experience and it all rather worries me. Don't let me drive you away. Perhaps, you can help us. You see . . .'

I stopped him. I had quite enough on my mind and I wasn't going to take on Imgram's headaches. 'I'll only be wasting time,' I said, smiling at him. 'I know less about this than you do. And besides, I've a lot of things to do.' I turned to Carol. 'When do we meet?'

'Must you go?' she asked, disappointed.

'You want to get on and I've things to do,' I said. 'But, let's fix a date.'

The three men were watching us. I could see Carol wanted me to stay, but I had enough of this concentrated interest in Imgram.

'Today's Thursday, isn't it?' She frowned over at the wall calendar. 'Tomorrow? Will you come tomorrow evening? I'm working tonight.'

'Swell, I'll be there.' I nodded to Highams, shook Imgram's hand and waved to Peter. 'Don't worry,' I said to Imgram. 'You're in very good hands.' I tried not to sound patronizing, but it was there all right. Perhaps, it was his shabby suit that gave me a superior complex.

Carol came with me to the car. 'He's so honest and sincere,' she said as I slid under the wheel. 'I'm so sorry for him, Clive.'

I regarded her serious, upturned face with amusement. 'Imgram? You should worry. He's bitten Gold for a quarter of a million, hasn't he?'

She waved this aside. 'R.G. says he has no ideas, but he is full of them. Good ideas – great ideas, but R.G. doesn't understand them. If we left him alone, I do believe he'd make a far greater picture than anything Peter or Jerry could do. But Gold keeps interfering.'

'Odd little guy, isn't he?'

'I like him. He's straight and this all means so much to him.'

'Well, he needs to have something,' I said coldly. 'Did you notice the suit he was wearing?'

'It's not the suit that matters, Clive,' she returned, colour coming to her face.

'Well, have it your own way.' I reached forward and stabbed the starter button. 'Don't work too hard. I'll see you around eight tomorrow.'

'Clive.' She stepped up onto the running board. 'What did Gold arrange with you?'

'He wants me to do a story,' I said carelessly. 'I'll tell you about it tomorrow.'

'About this woman?'

I twisted in my seat. 'What woman?'

'When I suggested the idea, I knew I had made a mistake,' she said a little breathlessly. 'You want an excuse to see her, don't you? Oh Clive, I know you so well. You're just pretending that you want to write about her, but it isn't that. It's something far more complex than that. But, be careful, won't you? I can't stop you, but do be careful.'

'I don't even know what you're talking about,' I began, but she raised her hand.

'Don't Clive,' she said and turning, she ran back into the building.

I drove slowly to my appartment. The hands of the clock on the dashboard pointed to three-thirty when I drove into the garage. I had an uneasy feeling at the back of my mind. Although I told myself it wasn't anything to do with Carol, I knew I was playing a dangerous game. I wanted Carol. If she hadn't been such a worker, if she could have given me of her time, I guess I wouldn't have wanted any other woman. But with so much time on my hands I had to do something. Maybe, I thought, I'd better wash Eve out of my mind. Thinking like that was just kidding. I knew, even if I really wanted to – and I didn't – I should not be able to get free from her as easily as that.

I walked into my apartment, tossed my hat into the nearest chair and went to the library. I found a letter from International Pictures on my desk. I read it through carefully. There was no catch in it. Perhaps, the only suspicious thing about it was Gold's request to keep the arrangement confidential. But

then, he might easily be asking it for my sake as well as his own. He had laid down in black and white that he would pay me fifty thousand dollars for a shooting script to be entitled *Angels in Sables*, provided the story was based on our discussions and that the script met with his approval.

I wrote a hurried note to Merle Bensinger and enclosed the letter. Then I turned my attention to the article for the *Digest*.

'Women of Hollywood' seemed, on the face of it, an easy subject. But, I was not used to writing articles and I approached my task with considerable uneasiness and doubt.

I lit a cigarette and considered the problem. Concentration was difficult. I kept thinking of Carol. It frightened me to know she could read my mind so completely. I did not want to lose her and I knew, if I was not careful, that was what would eventually happen. Then Eve shouldered Carol out of my thoughts. I considered the coming week-end. Where should I take her? How would she behave? What would she wear? Why was she so cagey about appearing in public? If there was anyone to be cagey it should surely be me.

I picked up the newspaper and checked through the entertainments. I decided to take her to a theatre and after some hesitation I picked on *My Sister Eileen* as appropriate. The deck clock showed five fifteen and I hurriedly dropped the newspaper and threaded paper into my typewriter. I typed 'Women of Hollywood by Clive Thurston' at the top of the page and then sat back to stare at the typewriter keys. I had no idea how to begin the article. I wanted to say something sophisticated and witty, but my mind was completely barren.

I wondered uneasily if Eve would dress flashily and whether she would look what she was. It'd be an embarrassing situation if I ran into Carol when she was with me. I knew I was taking a risk. I had never seen Eve dressed and had no idea of her taste. I decided that I should have to select some small secluded restaurant where I was not known and where no one that I knew was likely to see me.

I lit another cigarette and tried once more to concentrate on the article. By six o'clock, the page in the typewriter was still blank, and I was in a slight panic.

Pulling the typewriter impatiently towards me, I began to hammer out words, hoping that they would make sense. I wrote like this until seven o'clock, then I gathered up the sheets of paper and pinned them together. I made no attempt to read them through.

Russell came in to tell me that my bath was ready. He eyed the sheets of paper in my hand approvingly.

'Gone all right, sir?' he asked in his most encouraging manner.

'Yes,' I said, moving to the door. 'I'll check it through when I come back and you can take it down to Miss Bensinger first thing tomorrow.'

I did not arrive back from the Wilburs until one fifteen. It had been a good party and my head was a little heavy from the excellent champagne I had been drinking most of the evening. I forgot about the article lying on my desk to be checked and I went straight to bed.

Russell woke me at nine o'clock the following morning. 'Sorry to disturb you, sir,' he said apologetically, 'but shall I take the article to Miss Bensinger now?'

I sat up with a grunt of dismay. My head felt heavy and my mouth like the bottom of a bird-cage. 'Hell!' I exclaimed. 'I forgot to look it over. Get it, will you, Russell? I'll do it now.'

I had finished my first cup of coffee by the time he returned. He handed me the typewritten sheets. 'I'll just clean your shoes, sir, then I'll be back.'

I waved him away and began to read what I had written. In less than three minutes, I was out of bed and running downstairs to my study. I knew I could never send this stuff to Merle. It was hopeless. It was so awful that I could scarcely believe that I had written it.

I began hammering away at the typewriter, but my head ached and I could not string two sentences together. After a half an hour, I had worked myself into a furious rage. For the fourth time, I snatched the paper out of the typewriter and threw it angrily to the floor.

Russell put his head round the door. 'It's after ten, sir,' he reminded me apologetically.

I turned on him furiously. 'Get out!' I shouted. 'Get out and for God's sake stop worrying me!'

He backed out of the room, his eyes wide with surprise.

I turned savagely back to my typewriter. At eleven o'clock my head was nearly bursting and my temper was seething. Round me were crumpled balls of paper. I knew it was no good. I could not begin to write the article. Panic, rage and disappointment made me want to pick up the typewriter and smash it to the floor.

Then the telephone rang.

I snatched it up. 'What is it?' I snapped.

'I'm waiting for the Digest article . . .' Merle began plaintively.

'You'll go on waiting,' I said, the whole of my concentrated rage and bitterness bursting from me. 'Who do you think I am? Do you think I haven't anything better to do than to bother with a goddam mawkish article for the Digest? To hell with them! Tell 'em to write it themselves if they need it so much!' And I slammed down the receiver.

CHAPTER NINE

I DID not see Carol that evening. I did not feel like it. I did not feel like doing anything after the way I had bawled out Merle. Once I had cooled down, I realized just how crazy I had been. Merle was the best agent in Hollywood. Writers and stars fought for her to handle their business. She was only interested in five-figured incomes and everyone knew it. So if she was your agent, your credit stood high everywhere. By bawling her out as I had done, it was likely that she would drop me. Right now, I could not afford to be without Merle. If there was any work to be had, it would come through her. In actual fact, she was my meal ticket. As soon as I had realized what a fool I had been and seen what a mess I had landed myself in, I telephoned her. Her secretary said she was out and she did not know when she would be back. She sounded as if she did not care. This did not look good to me so I wrote Merle a note, apologizing for what I had done and pleading a hangover. I said I hoped she would understand. I did everything in that letter except kiss her feet and I sent it to her office by special messenger.

After lunch, I still felt like hell. The idea of passing up three thousand dollars was wormwood to me. But what worried me more was that I could not sit down and write a simple article at a moment's notice. That was something to worry about. It told me, as nothing else could tell me, that I had not the equipment to make the grade as a first-class writer. The thought stuck in my throat like a fish hook.

Anyway, I did not feel like spending the evening with Carol. I knew she would start something about Eve and my temper was too jumpy to take anything from anyone. So I called her and told her I had to go to Los Angeles on urgent business. She wanted to see me on Saturday, but I lied myself out of that too. I could tell by her voice that she was depressed and disappointed, but I was determined to spend the week-end with E-

and no one was going to upset my plans. All the same I felt a heel when Carol tried to persuade me.

Then I wrote to Eve. I told her I would call for her at six-thirty the following evening, that we would go to the theatre and have the rest of the week-end to get to know each other. I enclosed a hundred dollar bill saying it was for bed-and-breakfast charges. This was the first time I had ever paid a woman to go with me. I did not like it. Somehow I began comparing myself with Harvey Barrow, but I told myself that she would come out with me before long just for the fun of it. That made things different.

The following morning while Russell prepared breakfast, I lounged in the big armchair by the window and idled with the newspaper.

'Russell,' I said, when he brought the coffee and eggs, 'I'll be away for the week-end. I want you to go out to Three Point and pack my things. I'm giving the place up. See the Estate agents and fix it with them.'

He slid the chair under me as I sat down at the table. 'It's a pity to give the place up, isn't it, Mr. Clive?' he said, spreading a snowy napkin across my knees. 'I thought you liked it out there.'

'So I do, but I have to cut down on something and Three Point is costing me plenty.'

'I see, sir.' His eyebrows crawled up his forehead. 'I wasn't aware that we were financially embarrassed. I'm sorry to hear that.'

'Maybe it isn't as bad as that,' I said, not wishing him to be scared. 'Let's face it, Russell. "Rain Check" is now only paying $200 a week. Last week, it didn't pay at all. There'll be nothing from the books until the end of September and when I do get payment it won't be all that good. So I have to cut down for a while.'

Russell looked vaguely alarmed. 'Won't you be writing something else before long, sir?'

'I'm working on something now,' I said, taking the cup of coffee he handed to me. 'Once that's finished, we'll be on top of the world . . . or we should be.'

He didn't look impressed. 'I'm glad to hear that, sir,' he said. 'Would it be another play?'

'It's this picture I was telling you about for Mr. Gold.'

'Oh, I see, sir.' His fat face became gloomy.

I still had Merle on my mind, so I called her office. Her secretary said she had gone away for the week-end. I asked for an appointment for Monday, but she said Merle was tied up all the week. I said I would call her later.

At six o'clock, just as I was leaving to pick up Eve, Carol rang.

'Oh, Clive, I was scared I was going to miss you,' she said, her voice was tense with excitement.

'Two more minutes and you would have missed me,' I said, wondering what was coming.

'You really must come over, Clive.'

With my eye on the clock, I said it was impossible.

'But I've been talking to Jerry Highams about "Rain Check",' she went on, her words stumbling over themselves. 'He says Bernstien's looking for a story. They're both coming over to see me tonight and if you were there you might interest Bernstien in your plot. Jerry thinks it's right for him. I told him you'd be here.'

I wondered if Carol had guessed what I was intending to do and had thought of this to prevent my seeing Eve. If Bernstien was really interested in *Rain Check*, it would be ridiculous to let such an opportunity slip. Bernstien was second only to Jerry Highams and he had a big reputation for slick, sophisticated pictures.

'Look, Carol,' I said, trying to sound reasonable. 'I'm really tied up tonight. Can't Bernstien see me on Monday?'

She said he had to make a decision over the week-end as Gold was getting impatient. He had two other stories he was considering, but if we all worked on him we might easily get him to do *Rain Check*.

'It's just his type of picture,' Carol urged. 'He'll listen to Jerry and if you're there and can give him an outline, I'm sure he'll go for it. Now do be sensible, Clive, this is so important.'

But so was Eve. If I put her off at the last moment, I might never get the chance of taking her out again.

'I can't do it,' I said, not bothering to keep the impatience out of my voice. 'Don't I keep telling you? I have to go out of town.'

There was a long pause and I heard Carol catch her breath in a little gasp. That told me she was losing her temper too. 'What's so important, Clive?' she asked sharply. 'Don't you want to get into pictures?'

'I am in them, sweetheart, remember?' I said. 'Aren't I working for Gold?'

Was I working for Gold? Only God and Gold knew that.

'Oh, do be sensible, Clive.' There was an edge to her voice now. 'What will they think if you don't show up?'

'That's not my headache,' I snapped back. 'I didn't make the arrangement. You knew I was tied up, didn't you?'

'I knew all right, but I thought your work came first. All right, Clive, have a good time,' and she hung up on me.

That made two women who were sour with me. I slammed down the receiver and then shot three inches of bourbon into a glass and swallowed it at a gulp. Then I snatched up my hat and went down to my car.

By the time I turned into Laurel Canyon Drive, the bourbon was hitting me and I felt fine. I pulled up outside Eve's house and I flicked the horn. Then I lit a cigarette and waited. I waited exactly one minute and fifteen seconds which brought the hands of the dashboard clock to six-thirty. Then Eve came out of the house.

When I saw her, I was out of the car and opening the white gate for her in a split second.

She was wearing a dark blue coat and skirt, a white silk shirt, no hat and under her arm, she carried a large handbag with her initials in platinum on the flap. That does not sound anything unusual, but if you could have seen the cut of that costume you would have stared as I was staring. Its severity and the way it was moulded to her trim figure made it the smartest outfit I had seen on a woman for a long time.

Then I noticed her legs. In Hollywood, legs are just com-

monplace. Ugly looking legs are as rare as natural platinum blondes. But Eve's legs meant something. They were not only pretty and neat and beautifully hosed, but they had a distinct personality of their own.

I realized with a shock of startled pleasure that I had a smart, sophisticated, well-groomed woman on my hands. Nor did she look plain. She was carefully made-up ... not too much ... and her eyes were bright.

'Hello there,' I said, taking her hand. 'Are you always so punctual?'

She pulled her hand away as she asked, 'Do I look all right?'

I opened the car door, but she made no move to get in. She stood frowning at me, her even teeth nervously chewing her underlip.

'You look terrific,' I said, smiling at her. 'Smart as paint. That costume's a knock out.'

'Don't lie,' she said sharply, although her frown went away. 'You know you're just saying that.'

'No kidding. What are you waiting for ... get in. If I'd've known you were going to look as good as this, I'd've been here yesterday.'

She got into the car. Her skirt was so tight that it rode up as she settled down on the springy cushions. I took my time closing the door.

'Did anyone tell you that you've a swell pair of eyes?' I said, grinning down at her.

She hurriedly adjusted her skirt. 'Now behave, Clive,' she said, with a little giggle.

'That'll be hard work with you looking like you do,' I said and slid under the steering wheel.

'You're sure I look all right?' She opened her bag and peered into a small enamel-backed mirror.

'Positive,' I said, offering her a cigarette. 'You could go anywhere with anyone.'

She looked at me with malicious humour. 'I bet you thought I was going to look like a tart, didn't you?' she asked. I could see she was pleased that she had surprised me.

I laughed. 'I'll admit it,' and I gave her a light.

'Do you know what?' She forced smoke down her nostrils. 'I'm as nervous as a cat.'

I was nervous too. Perhaps not nervous, but shy. This was a new experience for me and I was getting a big bang out of it.

'I don't believe it. Why should you be nervous with me?'

'Well, I am. Where are we going?'

'First the Manhattan Grill and then to see *My Sister Eileen*. All right?'

'Hmmm.' She flicked ash from the cigarette. 'I hope you've a table against the wall.'

'Why?' I asked puzzled. 'Why do you want a table against the wall?'

'I like to see people coming in,' she said, not looking at me. 'I have to be careful. Clive. My husband has friends all over.'

Now I was discovering things. 'So that's why we can't go to the Brown Derby and the rest of the high spots,' I said. 'Would your husband object to me?'

She nodded. 'It'll be all right once I've told him about you, but I don't want anyone to tell him first.'

'You mean he wouldn't mind you going out with me if he knew about me?'

Again she nodded.

'Why wouldn't he? I'd mind like hell if I were your husband.'

Her lips tightened. 'He trusts me.'

That's more than I would do, I thought. If I were your husband I would not trust you further than I could throw you. 'I see,' I said. 'Well, how are you going to put me right with your husband? You don't even know who I am.'

She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes. 'I was rather expecting that you'd tell me that.'

I did some quick thinking. 'Do all your other men friends tell you who they are?' I hedged.

'I don't go out with other men,' she said. 'You see, I do have to be careful.'

'In your game with an unsuspecting husband, I suppose you

do,' I returned. 'But where is he? What does he do, for God's sake?'

She hesitated for a moment. 'He's an engineer. I only see him once in months. He's in Brazil now.'

I didn't know whether I liked all this. 'Suppose he takes it into his head to fly back tonight?' I asked jokingly, although at the back of my mind I thought it would be an awkward situation for me if he did.

She shook her head emphatically. 'He won't. You don't have to worry. He always tells me when he's coming back.'

I still was not too happy. 'Maybe he might surprise you some day. Isn't it risky?'

'Why? You don't think that place is my home, do you? It's just my business address. I was thinking about taking you back to my real home tonight, but then I thought it would be better not.'

'So you've two homes? Where's the other one?'

'Los Angeles.' By the way she said it I knew I wasn't getting any more out of her.

'So he doesn't know anything about Laurel Canyon Drive?'

'Of course, he doesn't.'

'And you have to be careful?'

She hunched her shoulders. 'He'd kill me if he found out,' and she giggled suddenly.

I started the engine and engaged the gear. 'You've an odd sense of humour.'

She shrugged. 'I suppose he'll find out. I always say my sins will find me out. They will too. Then I'll have to run to you for protection.'

'Before I commit myself, I want to know just how big your husband is,' I returned, knowing she was fooling.

'He's very big,' she returned, sliding down in her seat so that her head rested against the cushioned back. 'And tough and strong.'

'Now you're getting me scared,' I said grinning. 'You'll be telling me he beats you next.'

She smiled in a secret sort of a way. 'He does sometimes.'

I shot her a quick, startled glance. 'You're the last woman I would have thought to stand for that.'

'I'd stand anything for him except another woman.'

I could tell by her voice that she meant it and I experienced an irritable pang of envy. I had not reckoned with a husband for a rival.

'How long have you been married?'

'Oh a long time.' She turned her head so she could look at me. 'And don't keep asking questions.'

'I won't,' I said and to change the subject, 'do you know what would be swell?'

'What?'

'A large Scotch and soda. Don't you think that'd be swell or don't you drink?'

'I don't mind, but I don't drink much.'

'How much?

She giggled. 'I can't take it. Three Scotches and I'm tight.'

'I don't believe you.'

'You don't have to. I'm just telling you.' She flicked the cigarette butt out of the window.

'All right, then let's get tight,' I said and turned the car into Vine Street and pulled up outside the little bar in sight of the *Brown Derby*.

She peered out of the window doubtfully. 'Is this all right?' she asked. 'I haven't been here before.'

'It's all right,' I said, getting out of the car and walking round to open the door for her. 'I always come here when I want to do a Garbo.' As she got out, I again admired her legs. 'You should relax. After all, we haven't done anything wrong . . . yet.'

She followed me into the bar which was half empty.

The Negro bartender smiled at me.

'You sit over there and I'll get you a drink,' I said. 'Scotch?'

She nodded and moved across to a table in the far corner. I saw several men watching her with intent expressions. They watched her all the way to the table and one even turned in his chair to watch her sit down.

'Two double whiskies,' I said to the bartender.

He shot them across the counter.

'And dry ginger.'

As he went to the refrigerator, I leaned forward so that my back was to Eve and I emptied one of the whiskies into the other glass. If three whiskies made her tight, I thought, let's see what four can do.

The Negro gave me the dry ginger and I divided it between the two glasses.

'There you are,' I said, joining Eve at the table. 'To a lovely week-end.' I drank some of the dry ginger. It tasted like hell without any whisky.

She looked at her glass. 'What's this?'

'A whisky with a lot of dry ginger,' I said. 'What do you think it is?'

'There seems an awful lot of whisky.'

'They leave the dry ginger out in the sun here. It gives it a suntan.'

She drank half of the liquor, pulled a face and put the glass on the table. 'There's more than one whisky in that.'

'Can I help it if the barman gets the shakes? Come on, one more and we'll go.'

'You're trying to get me tight,' she said sharply.

I laughed at her. 'Nuts,' I said. 'Why should I want to do that?'

She shrugged, finished the whisky and didn't protest as I went to the bar again. I went through the same process. For a time, anyway, I wanted to keep sober.

I kept my eye on her when we got into the street. As far as I could see, the whisky hadn't touched her. 'Three whiskies and I'm tight,' she had said. Perhaps I should have kept it to three. She was now carrying eight whiskies and she looked as sober as a coffin.

'How are you feeling?' I asked, when we had reached the Manhattan Grill.

'All right.' She slid out of the car. 'Why?'

'I just like to keep in touch with you,' I returned, following her into the grill room.

There was a big crowd in the cocktail bar and Eve hung back. Her eyes scanned faces and the two lines above the bridge of her nose were now deep furrows.

I took her elbow in my hand and pushed her gently through the crowd. 'It's all right,' I said. 'Don't get jumpy.'

'I don't know if it is,' she returned under her breath. 'This is too crowded for me.'

We worked our way into the restaurant and when she had settled down on the sofa seat against the wall, she looked happier.

'I'm always like this,' she said, her eyes moving continuously round the room. 'I'm sorry, but I do have to be careful.'

'Not always,' I reminded her. 'You only go out with me. Your other clients don't take you out.'

'Sometimes they do,' she said without thinking. 'You don't expect me to stay home every night, do you?'

That was lie number two. First she said three whiskies laid her out when eight whiskies left her cold. Then she had said she never went out with clients and now she said she did. I was beginning to wonder just how much was truth that she told me.

We ordered dinner.

As she was eight drinks ahead of me, I thought I might as well begin to catch up. After a couple of stiff shots, I suddenly decided to tell her who I was. She would have to know sooner or later and there seemed no sense in delaying any longer.

'Let's get introduced,' I said. 'You know my name well.'

There was immediate interest in her eyes. 'Do I? Don't tell me you're famous.'

'Do I look famous?'

'Tell me who you are.' She wasn't the Eve I knew any more. She was human, very curious and a little excited.

'The name,' I said watching her closely, 'is Clive Thurston.'

She wasn't like Harvey Barrow. I could see it meant something to her at once. For a second, a look of disbelief was in her eyes, then she turned to face me. 'So that's why you wanted to know what I thought of "Angels in Stables",' she exclaimed. 'Of course. And I said I didn't like it.'

'That's all right,' I said. 'I wanted the truth and I got it.'

'I saw your play "Rain Check" . . . Jack took me. I was sitting behind a pillar and only saw half of it.'

'Jack?' I was on to that quickly.

'My husband.'

'Did he like it?'

'Yes . . .' she looked at me half hesitating. 'I'd better introduce myself . . . I am Mrs. Pauline Hurst.'

'Not Eve?'

'Eve to you please.'

'Yes . . . although I like Pauline. It suits you, but so does Eve.'

After dinner, we drove over to the theatre. The play amused her as I hoped it would. We had several quick drinks during the intermissions. As we were returning from the bar during the last intermission, I felt someone touch my arm. I looked round and found Frank Imgram behind me.

'Do you like it?' he asked, smiling.

I could have strangled him. He was certain to tell Carol that he had seen me.

'It's good,' I said, nodding at him, 'and beautifully acted.'

His eyes were on Eve. 'Yes – isn't it?'

Then the crowd separated us and I struggled back into my seat.

Eve looked at me inquiringly. 'Someone you know?'

'Imgram who wrote "The Land is Barren".'

'Does it matter that he saw me?'

I shook my head. 'Why should it?'

She shot me another look and did not say anything. The rest of the act was spoiled for me. I kept thinking of what Carol would say.

We were lucky to be among the first out. I did not see Imgram again. We got into the car and drove down Vine Street.

'Want a drink before we go home?' I asked.

'I think so.'

We went into the same little bar and we stayed there for some time. We drank a lot, but Eve did not show it. I was

feeling a little drunk and I thought it was time to stop. After all, I was driving.

'One more and then we'll go. Have a brandy?'

'Why?'

'Just to see if you can take it.'

Her eyes were bright, otherwise she seemed all right. 'I can take it,' she said.

I ordered a double brandy.

She looked at me. 'Not for you?'

'I'm driving.'

She drank the brandy neat.

We got into the car and I drove slowly to Laurel Canyon Drive.

'You can put the car in the garage,' she said. 'There's room for it.'

She had opened the front door and was waiting for me in the hall. I took my small grip from the Chrysler's trunk and followed her upstairs.

We entered the bedroom and she clicked on the lights.

'Well, here we are,' she said and I could see she was a little embarrassed. She stood with her chin almost on her shoulder, her eyes looking away from me, her right arm making a protective V over her chest, her left hand cupped tight under her right elbow.

I dropped my grip on the bed and put my hands on her biceps and pressed a little. Her arms were nice, but small. My fingers almost met round them.

We stood like that for a few seconds, then I drew her to me.

For a moment she tried to pull away, then she slowly lowered her arms from in front of her and put them round my shoulders.

CHAPTER TEN

I WOKE feeling hot and stifled. The grey light of the dawn came through the two windows facing me and shrouded the little room with a soft, mysterious light. For a moment, I could not remember where I was, then I saw the glass animals on the chest of drawers and I looked immediately at Eve who was sleeping at my side.

She slept curled up, one arm above her head. Her eyes being closed, youth had descended on her face. I propped myself up on my elbow and watched her, marvelling that she could look so young and child-like. Sleep had smoothed the lines in her face and softened the hard, defiant chin. She looked, in sleep, more elfish than ever, but I knew when her eyes opened this would all go. It was her eyes that gave the clue to her character. They were the windows through which you could see her rebellious spirit and the secret shadows of her life. Even in sleep, she did not rest. Her body jerked and twitched and her mouth moved as if she were talking to herself. She moaned softly and her fingers clenched and unclenched. She slept like a woman who lived entirely on tortured, tightly strung nerves.

I lowered her arms from above her head. She sighed heavily and reaching out, she put her arms round me and gripped me tightly.

'Darling,' she murmured, 'don't leave me.'

Of course, she was asleep. Of course, she was not speaking to me. Perhaps she was dreaming of her husband or a lover; but I wanted it to be me she was speaking to and I held her close, her head on my shoulder.

Her body suddenly gave a great bound as if her nerves had bunched themselves together like a coiled spring and snapped apart. Then she woke and pushed away from me.

She blinked at me, yawned and flopped back on her pillow. 'Hello,' she said. 'What time is it?'

I looked at my wrist watch. It was five thirty-five.

'Oh God!' she exclaimed. 'Can't you sleep?'

I again realized how hot and stifling it was in bed. 'Hov many blankets have we got on?' I asked, counting them. Ther were five and a quilt. I must have been pretty drunk not to hav noticed that last night.

'Do you want all these?' I asked her.

She yawned again. 'Of course I do. I feel cold in bed.'

'I'll say you do.' I slid out and began to strip the blanket back.

She sat up in alarm. 'Don't do that, Clive . . . you're not to!'

'Don't get excited,' I said. 'You'll get 'em back.'

I folded the blankets so that I had only two over me. The res I laid on her side. 'How's that?'

She curled down in the bed again. 'Mmmmm,' she sighed 'I've got an awful head. Was I tight last night?'

'You ought to've been.'

'I think I was.' She stretched luxuriously. 'Oh, I'm so tired Do go to sleep, Clive.'

My mouth felt stale. I wished I could ring for Russell anc have coffee. Obviously there was no service here.

She looked up. 'Do you want coffee?'

I brightened. 'Not a bad idea.'

'Well, put the kettle on. Marty's left it all ready,' and she drew the blankets to her chin.

It was a long time since I had made coffee for myself, but I wanted it, so I went into the other room. It was sparsely furnished with only one easy chair. The small kitchen was jus beyond. I put on the kettle and lit a cigarette.

'Where's the bathroom?' I called.

'Upstairs on your right.'

I climbed the steep stairs. There were three doors leading of the landing at the top of the stairs. Cautiously I looking into all three rooms. Except for the bathroom, the other two rooms were unfurnished. Dust lay on the floor and obviously no one ever went into them.

I went into the bathroom, sponged my face and brushed my hair; then I wandered downstairs again and found the kettle

'You'd better,' she snapped and turning her back on me, she curled further down in the bed.

I stared up at the ceiling, savagely angry. I was angry with her because she had seen through me. She had sensed that she now meant something to me. She did. I did not want to admit it, but, there it was. I found her exciting, mysterious and I wanted her for myself. I knew it was lunacy. Perhaps if she had encouraged me it might have been different; but her calculated indifference made me want her all the more. It went beyond sex. I wanted to break down the wall she had erected between us. I wanted to make her care for me.

I woke again when the sun streamed through the cream blinds. Eve was in my arms, her head on my shoulder and her mouth against my throat. She was sleeping peacefully and her body was limp and still.

I held her, feeling good. She was easy to hold, light and small and warm. I liked her breath against my throat and the smell of perfume in her hair. She slept like that for almost an hour and then she moved, opened her eyes, raised her head and looked at me.

'Hello,' she said and smiled.

I touched her face with my fingers. 'Your hair smells nice,' I said. 'Did you sleep well?'

'Mmmmm.' She yawned and rested her head back on my shoulder. 'Did you?'

'Yes . . . how's the head?'

'All right. Are you hungry? Shall I get you something to eat?'

'I'll get it.'

'You stay here.' She broke away from me and slid out of bed. In her blue nightdress, she looked slight and childish. She put on her dressing gown, looked in the mirror, grimaced and left me.

I went up to the bathroom, and after a leisurely shave, I returned to find her in bed. On the table by the bed was the tray containing fresh coffee and a plate of thinly cut bread and butter.

'You don't want me to cook you anything, do you?' she asked

idea how marvellous it was. I went up to the mantel-piece and swept everything off it. The clock, Jack's glass animals.' she pointed across to the chest of drawers, 'These are the only ones that survived. I keep them here because he thinks they're all smashed. And there were photographs and – well you know – everything.' She lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. 'Of course he was furious when he came back. I'd locked myself in the bedroom but he kicked the door down. I thought he was going to kill me but he just packed his bag and walked out without even looking at me.'

'And you haven't seen him since?'

'Oh, he knows me.' She tapped ash into her empty coffee cup .'He knows what I'm like. I'm always getting into tempers. I've no time for anyone who hasn't a temper . . . have you?'

'I like a peaceful life.'

She shook her head. 'When Jack gets wild . . .' she threw up her hands and laughed.

I found she was quite willing to talk about her husband. In fact, she seemed anxious and pleased to have someone who would listen. By asking her a few leading questions and by letting her talk, I pieced together much of her background.

I knew by now, that she was a skilful liar, but some of the things she told me I felt must be true.

She had been married for ten years. Before her marriage I gathered she had been pretty wild. She met Jack at a party and they took one look at each other and that was enough. It must have been one of those rare violent physical clashes that left no doubt that they were meant for each other. They were married almost immediately.

At that time, she had money of her own. She did not say how much she had, but she must have been fairly well off. Jack was a mining engineer whose work took him to many distant countries – places where a woman could not go. The first four years of their married life must have been dull and lonely for a woman like Eve. She was, of course, neurotic and highly strung. She had extravagant tastes and Jack was not making big money. That did not matter at the time because she kept her independence and refused to accept any of his money. He knew

she was comfortably off and the arrangement suited him. But Eve was a gambler. She admitted that both Jack and she were born gamblers. She played the races while he concentrated on poker for big stakes. Because he was an expert player he made a little more than he lost.

While he was in West Africa – this would be some six years ago – she got in with a fast set and she began to drink heavily and to plunge recklessly on horses. She had continued bad luck, but it did not stop her. Always at the back of her mind, she believed that she could recoup her losses. Then one morning, she discovered that she had worked through every nickel of her capital and was high and dry. She knew Jack would be furious with her, so she did not tell him. She was popular with men and it only needed this financial pressure to make her what she was now.

She had been living on men for the past six years. The unsuspecting Jack still thought that she had her comfortable income and she kept up the illusion.

'I suppose some day he'll find out ... then I don't know what'll happen,' she concluded with a fatalistic shrug of her shoulders.

'Why don't you give it up?' I asked, lighting my tenth cigarette.

'I must have money ... and besides what shall I do with myself all day? It's lonely enough as it is.'

'Lonely? Are you lonely?'

'I have no one .. except Marty. She goes about seven o'clock and I'm here by myself until she comes the following morning.'

'But you have friends ... surely?'

'I've no one,' she repeated flatly; 'and I don't want anyone.'

'Not even now that you know me?'

She twisted round in bed so she could look at me. 'I wonder just what your game is,' she said. 'You're up to something. If you're not in love with me ... then what is it?'

'I've told you. I like you. You interest me and I want to be your friend.'

'No man's my friend,' she said.

I stubbed out my cigarette and slid my arm round her, pulling her close to me. 'Don't be so suspicious,' I said. 'Everyone needs a friend some time or other. I might be able to help you.'

She relaxed against me. 'How? I don't need any help. The only trouble I might have is from the police. I have a judge who would take care of that.'

She was right of course, apart from money there was nothing I could really do for her.

'You might be ill . . .' I began, but she just laughed at me.

'I've never been ill and if I was no one would care. That's a time when men always leave a woman. She's no use to them when she's ill.'

'You're a hell of a cynic, aren't you?'

'So would you be if you'd lived my life.'

I rested my face against her hair. 'Do you like me, Eve?'

'You're all right,' she returned indifferently; 'and don't fish, Clive.'

I laughed. 'Where shall we lunch?'

'Anywhere . . . I don't mind.'

'Shall we take a movie in tonight?'

'All right.'

'That's fixed then.' I looked at the clock on the mantelshelf. It was after twelve. 'You know I could do with a drink.'

'And I must have a bath.' She slid away from me and got out of bed. 'Make the bed, Clive. That's one thing I can never do.'

'All right,' I said, watching her fuss before the mirror.

I got up and made the bed. Then I went into the other room and telephoned the *Barbecue* Restaurant and reserved a sofa table against the wall.

Eve had come down by then.

'The water's running,' she called. 'What shall I wear?'

'Oh, a dress, I think,' I said. 'Although I liked that costume last night.'

'Costumes suit me better than a dress.' She came to the door as I was going upstairs. She put her hands on her flat chest. 'They suit my figure,' she added and giggled.

I stubbed out my cigarette and slid my arm round her, pulling her close to me. 'Don't be so suspicious,' I said. 'Everyone needs a friend some time or other. I might be able to help you.'

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'All right,' I returned, 'you please yourself.'

The rest of the day passed too quickly for me. I seemed to have gained her complete confidence and she talked about her experiences with men and her husband was never far from her conversation. We enjoyed outselves. But I had a feeling that I could only get so far. There was still this invisible wall which every now and then I came up against. She would not tell me how much she earned. When I asked her if she saved money, she said, 'Every Monday I go to the bank and deposit one half of what I've made. I never touch that.'

This came out so glibly that I did not believe her. I knew how careless and extravagant this kind of woman always is. I was willing to bet that she had not saved a nickel, although of course, I could not give her the lie.

I tried to persuade her to take out an endowment policy. 'It'll be something when you are old and when you'll be glad of the money,' I explained.

But she wasn't interested. I doubt if she even listened. 'I can't be bothered,' she said. 'I'm saving money . . . besides what business is it of yours?'

One thing she said, pleased me. It was after we had seen Bogart's latest picture and we were driving back to Laurel Canyon Drive. We had both been drinking heavily and she had slipped low down in the cushioned seat of the car with her head back and her eyes closed. 'Marty said I'd be bored with you,' she said. 'She thought I was crazy to spend a whole week-end with you. She'll be surprised when she hears I didn't throw you out.'

I put my hand over hers. 'Would you have thrown me out?'

'I would have if you bored me.'

'So you've enjoyed the week-end?'

'Mmmmm . . . very much.'

Well, that was something.

We lay in the dark and talked far into the night. I do not think she had talked with such complete freedom to anyone for a long time. It was as if she had opened the gates of a dam and words came from her at first haltingly and then in an uninterrupted flow. I cannot remember everything she said. Al-

though most of it was about Jack. Their life seemed to be made up of endless quarrels and wildly exciting reunions. From what she told me, his relations with her were based on a kind of brutal affection which appealed to her odd, complexed nature. The fact that he occasionally beat her made no difference so long as he was faithful to her. Of this, she was sure. She told me how one evening they had come home from a party and she had slipped and fallen in the street. She had turned her ankle which immediately swelled up. Jack had laughed at her and had left her sitting on the curb. He was tired and he wanted his bed. When she did finally limp home, she found him asleep and the following morning, he drove her out of bed, when she could hardly walk, to bring him coffee. She seemed to admire him the more for this kind of treatment.

This defeated me. It was so outside my normal relations with women that I could not understand it.

'Are you telling me that you don't like considerate treatment?' I asked her.

I felt her shoulders lift. 'I hate weakness, Clive. Jack's strong. He knows what he wants and nothing will stop him.'

'Well, if you like to be treated like that . . .' I gave up.

When she talked about the men who came to see her, she did not mention names. I admired her for her discretion. At least, it meant that she would not talk about me.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I REACHED my apartment around noon. As I entered the elevator the boy gave me one of those it's-six-months-to-Christmas smiles. 'Good morning, Mr. Thurston.'

'Morning,' I said and experienced the inevitable lift in my stomach as the elevator raced between floors.

'Did you see about the two guys who killed themselves last night outside Manola's?' The elevator boy asked as I left the cage.

'No.'

'Sure thing. They got fighting over a dame and they fell off the sidewalk, bang under the wheels of a truck. One of the guys had his face stove in.'

'That should give him a new outlook,' I said and opened my apartment door.

Russell was in the lobby. 'Good morning, Mr. Clive,' he said in a voice that told me he thought it was anything but a good morning.

'Hello.' I was about to go to my bedroom when I caught his eye. I stopped. 'What's wrong?'

'Miss Carol's waiting in the lounge,' he said reproachfully. His whole body, his face, his eyebrows oozed reproach.

'Miss Carol?' I stared at him. 'What's she want?' Why isn't she at the Studio?'

'I don't know, sir. She's been waiting more'n a half an hour.'

I gave him my bag. 'Put that in my bedroom,' I said, and walked across the lobby to the lounge.

Carol was by the window as I entered. She did not turn although she must have heard me. I admired her slim back and the cool white and red check frock she was wearing. 'Hello,' I said, closing the door.

She stubbed her cigarette in the ashtray and swung round on

her heels. She looked steadily at me and my eyes gave ground. 'Aren't you working this morning?' I went on, crossing the room and standing by her side.

'I wanted to see you.'

'Swell.' I waved to the settee. 'Sit down.'

As she walked to the settee, I said, 'Nothing wrong, is there?'

She sat down. 'I don't know yet.' She reached for another cigarette, fitted it in her holder and lit up.

I suddenly felt a little tired and not in the mood to be lectured. I stood over her. 'Look here, Carol . . .' I began, but she held up her hand.

'It's not going to be a "Look here . . ." kind of conversation,' she said sharply.

'I'm sorry, Carol, but I'm on edge this morning.' I didn't want to quarrel with her. 'There's something wrong. You'd better give it to me straight.'

'I met Merle Bensinger this morning. She's worried about you.'

'If Merle Bensinger's been discussing my affairs with you,' I said coldly, 'she's forgetting she's my paid agent.'

'Merle likes you, Clive. She thought we were engaged.'

I sat down slowly in an armchair away from Carol. 'Even if we were married, it's still not Merle's business to talk about my affairs,' I said, cold fury tripping my words.

'She didn't talk about your affairs,' Carol said quietly. 'She asked me to try to persuade you to work.'

I lit a cigarette and tossed the match into the empty fireplace. 'But I *am* working,' I said. 'If she's worried about her goddam commission, why doesn't she say so?'

'All right, Clive, if that's the way you feel about it.'

'That's just the way I do feel about it. For God's sake, Carol, no writer can be bullied into writing. You know that. It's either there or it isn't. Merle wanted me to do a cockeyed article for the *Digest*. I just didn't feel like it. That's why she's sore.'

'She didn't say anything about the *Digest*, but never mind about Merle then.' She crossed her slim ankles. 'About Bernstien, Clive.'

'What about him?'

'You know he came round to my place on Saturday?'

'Yeah, you told me.'

'I did what I could. I read him parts of your play. I even persuaded him to take it away with him.'

I stared at her. 'You gave him a copy of the play?' I repeated. 'Where did you get the script from?'

'Oh, I got it,' she said, a little impatiently. 'That doesn't matter. I did so hope . . .' She broke off with a gesture of despair. Then she said, 'If you had been there, it would have made all the difference. I'm afraid you've missed a great chance, Clive.'

I dragged down a lungful of smoke. 'I don't believe it,' I said. 'If Bernstien was all that anxious to do "Rain Check", he'd have done it. A guy who has to be talked into buying a story doesn't stay hot. He cools off after making a lot of promises. Don't tell me Imgram had to talk Gold into buying his story.'

'There's a big difference between "Rain Check" and "The Land is Barren",' Carol said sharply. Then as I shifted impatiently, she went on, 'I'm sorry, Clive. I didn't mean it in that way. You can't compare . . . I mean . . .'

'All right, all right,' I said angrily. 'You don't have to handle me with kid gloves. You mean my stuff isn't good enough to stand up by itself. It needs you and Jerry Highams and me to slop over Bernstien before he'll even look at it.'

She bit her lip nervously, but she didn't say anything.

'Well, that's not the way I want to sell my stuff. When I do sell it, I'll sell it because it's worth selling. I won't need to peddle it like a street salesman. So to hell with Bernstien.'

'All right, Clive, to hell with Bernstien. But, you're not getting anywhere, are you?'

'I'm all right. Can't you lay off worrying about me? Now, look here, Carol, let's get this straight. When I want anyone's help, I'll let you know. There're too many people taking an interest in me. It embarrasses me.' So as not to hurt her feelings, I added, 'Of course, I am grateful, but, after al' it is my business, I'm getting along fine.'

She again looked steadily at me. 'Are you?' she said. 'You've written nothing for two years. You're living on the past, Clive. That's just one thing you can't do in Hollywood. A writer's only as good as his next book or picture.'

'But my next picture is going to be good,' I said, trying to smile. 'Don't fuss, Carol. After all, Gold has made me an offer. That ought to tell you I'm not on the slide.'

'Oh, do stop posing, Clive,' she said, colour coming into her face. 'It's not a question of whether you can write. It's a question of when you're going to work.'

'Okay, suppose you leave that to me?' I said. 'What are you doing away from the Studio? I thought you were tied up with Imgram.'

'So I am. But I had to see you, Clive. People are talking.' She got to her feet and wandered across the room. 'We're supposed to be engaged, aren't we?'

That was something I didn't want to go into just then. 'What do you mean . . . people are talking?'

'About this week-end.' She turned to face me. 'How could you, Clive? How could you do such a thing? Have you gone crazy?'

Here it comes, I thought. 'If I knew what you were talking about . . .'

'Why lie to me? I know what happened. I should have thought by now you'd got all that out of your system. You still don't think you're a college boy, do you?'

I stared at her. 'What do you mean? Got what out of my system?'

She sat down again. 'Oh, Clive, at times, you are stupid and hateful,' she said, wearily. Anger had gone out of her voice. She was now desperately unhappy. 'You want to be irresistible, don't you? You want to be the big charmer and sweep all the women off their feet. Why do you pick on a woman like that? Where do you think it'll get you?'

I reached impatiently for a cigarette. 'You're saying some pretty hard things, Carol.' I was controlling my temper with difficulty. 'I'm not in the mood to stand much more of this.

Maybe you'd better go back to the Studio before we say something we'll be sorry about later.'

She sat still for a few seconds, her hands clenched on her knees and her body tense. Then she drew a deep breath and relaxed. 'I'm sorry, Clive,' she said. 'I'm going the wrong way about it. Can't you stop all this? Can't you just drop the whole thing? It's not too late, Clive.'

I flicked ash angrily onto the carpet. 'You're making a fuss about nothing,' I said. 'For God's sake, Carol, you must be sensible.'

'Did you get anywhere with her over the week-end?' she asked abruptly. 'Has she fallen for your charms yet?'

I jerked to my feet. 'Now look, Carol, I've had enough of this. I'd much rather you go. We'll hurt each other in a moment.

'Rex Gold has asked me to marry him.'

Years ago I was kicked by a horse. It was my own fault. I had been warned of its viciousness, but I thought I could handle it. But it suddenly had lashed out and I remembered lying on the wet, muddy ground, pain twisting at my guts and staring at the horse, not believing that it could have done this to me. I felt the same twisting pain in my guts now.

'Gold?' I said and sat down again.

Carol beat her fists together. 'I shouldn't have told you now,' she said. 'It's blackmail, isn't it, Clive? No, I shouldn't have told you now.'

'I didn't think that Gold . . .' and I stopped.

Why not? She was lovely. She was good at her job. She would make Gold a fine wife.

'What are you going to do?' I asked, after a long silence.

'I don't know,' she said. 'Not after this week-end.'

'What has the week-end to do with it?' I asked. 'I'd've thought it was whether you loved him or not.'

'Not in Hollywood,' Carol said. 'You know that as well as I do. If I thought that you and I . . .' She stopped, hesitated, and then went on, 'You're making it very hard for me, aren't you?'

I didn't say anything.

'You see, I love you, Clive.'

I reached out to take her hand, but she drew away. 'No, don't touch me. Let me talk. I've stood an awful lot from you. We've known each other for two years now. I suppose it's silly of me to live in the past, but I can't help remembering you when you first came to see Robert Rowan. Neither of us were anybody then. I liked you the moment I saw you. I thought your play was fine. I thought anyone who had these kind of sentiments must be good and kind and decent. I liked the scared, embarrassed look you always had when Rowan talked to you. You were simple and nice and not like the other men who came to that office. I thought you were going to do great things; that's why I told you to come out here and leave New York and everything it stood for. There was a time, before you found all your other friends, when you were glad to have me for company. We went everywhere and did everything. Once you asked me to marry you and I said yes. But, you'd forgotten about it the next morning. You didn't even bother to call me. I don't know, even now, how you feel about me, but I know how I feel about you. But that doesn't mean that I'm holding you to anything. That's not the way I want you.'

I wished she had not started this. I knew a decision had to be made and I wanted time to think. Until Saturday night, I loved Carol, now I was not sure. I knew I could not let her go on talking like this, stripping herself in front of me, unless I met her half-way. Otherwise, it would finish when she left me and I did not want it to finish. She was important to me. She represented the past two years which were the best years of my life. She represented understanding and kindness. She gave me confidence. It scared me to think what it would be like without her.

'I believed you when you said you loved me,' she went on. 'I suppose it was because you meant so much to me. There was something fine about you, Clive, when you were poor. I suppose success is bad for some people. It's been bad for you. You see, I'm worried about you. I can't really see how you're going to get anywhere now. You haven't learned anything new since you

first began to write. You think you have the magic touch, but you haven't. No one has . . . there isn't such a thing. It all comes from working and never being satisfied and moving on to a bigger theme each time you write. Then, of course, you must feel you want to say something and that something must be worth while saying.'

'That's a terrific speech,' I said impatiently, 'but we'll take it as read if you don't mind. What about you? Are you going to marry Gold?'

She closed her eyes. 'I don't know,' she said. 'I don't want to, but it has many advantages.'

'Are you sure?'

'Gold has imagination . . . power . . . money. He would give me a free hand. There are some great pictures to be made. Perhaps that is something you won't understand, Clive. But I'm ambitious. Not for myself. I want to see better pictures made. I could influence Gold. He would listen to me.'

'Never mind about educating the world, let's concentrate on ourselves. You don't have to marry Gold to educate the world, do you?'

'Would you mind?'

I had to talk now or I'd lose her. 'Of course I'd mind, but I want you to try to see it from my angle. I love you. I've loved you for a long time, but there isn't much I can do about it right now. Something's gone wrong. I can't write any more. If something doesn't happen soon, I'll be in a fix. I've been in a fix before, of course, but I've always been alone. I couldn't stand being in a fix with you.'

She examined her slim brown hands. 'It's only because you are out of touch with the things that matter. You've been having too good a time.' She paused, adjusted her cuffs so that they hid her wrists, and then jerked out, 'Why did you have to take that woman where you would be seen together?'

Rage swept through me. 'So that goddam success-writer squawked, did he?' I said. 'I thought he would. That's just about his weight – making mischief and gossiping.'

'Jerry Highams saw you too,' Carol said wearily.

'Well, what of it? Highams knows why I'm seeing her.

There's nothing else to it Carol. I wouldn't lie to you. I've a whale of a story I want to write about her. But that's all.'

Carol stood up. 'I must get back to the Studio,' she said. 'I'm sorry about all this, Clive. There's nothing we can do, is there?'

'Don't you believe me?' I asked, going to her. 'Gold commissioned this story. How else can I write it if I don't meet the woman?'

She shook her head. 'I don't know, Clive, and I don't particularly care. I'm rather tired of your women friends. I've had to share you with so many of them. I don't feel like competing with professionals. Until you've dropped her, I think we'd better not meet.'

'You can't mean that, Carol,' I said in alarm. 'Don't you want me to have a break? Gold's offering fifty thousand dollars. I can't write the story if I don't see her.' As she turned away. I took her arm. 'Look, I tell you there's nothing in it except the story. Can't you believe that?'

She pulled her arm free. 'No . . . but don't forget to be careful, Clive. You'll get hurt. She knows how to handle a man like you.'

My temper boiled up at this. 'All right,' I said, furious with her now. 'You're a dear, sweet girl. Thank you for the warning. I'll be careful. Every time I see her, I'll think of you and your warning and I'll be very, very careful.'

She flushed. 'You can keep your cheap sarcasm. You are asking for trouble and I'm very much afraid you'll get it.'

'You don't have to be afraid of anything. As long as I have your pity, I'll get along fine,' I said. 'We don't have to quarrel about it, do we? It's nicer for us to be agreeable and sort of phony about all this, isn't it?'

'You're the authority on phony, of course,' she retorted stung to anger. 'But, if that's really how you feel, then we don't have to quarrel about it.'

'Swell.' I was determined to make her as angry as I was. 'And ask me to the wedding. I won't come, but ask me because that'll be the one time I'll be able to turn Gold down. But I'm not turning down his fifty thousand dollars.'

There was contempt in her eyes and I suddenly wanted to hurt her.

'I can imagine the kind of wedding that Gold'll give you,' I went on, smiling at her. 'It'll be a technicolour wedding. You know the sort of stuff. The bride looked lovely. She gave herself to Rex Gold so she could educate the world by making better pictures. That'll get a hell of a laugh.' I took out my cigarette case and selected a cigarette. 'You did say you weren't competing with the professionals? Is that quite true, my sweet?'

'I hope she hurts you,' Carol said, her face white. 'You need hurting. You need a woman like that who can prick your mean, horrid little ego. I think she'll do it. I hope so. I hope so very much.'

'You know, I'm glad you're a girl. I'm glad you're in my apartment and under my protection, because it stops me doing what I feel like doing.'

'I suppose you'd like to punch me in the face?'

'That's it. That's just what I'd like to do, my pet.'

'Good-bye, Clive.'

'That's terrific. That's what they call restrained drama. It'd make a great curtain. Nothing vulgar . . . final, of course, but definitely not vulgar. You're a swell script writer and you've a swell sense of the theatre. But you'll have to watch your lines on your wedding night, my sweet.'

She was at the door. She didn't look back. Then she was gone.

When the door closed behind her, the room seemed very empty. I went over to the sideboard and poured myself a whisky. I drank it without putting the bottle down and I immediately poured another. I did that four times. Then I put the bottle back and walked into the lobby. I was feeling a little tight and I wanted to cry.

As I put my hat on, Russell came down the stairs. He looked at me mournfully, but he didn't say anything.

'Miss Carol's marrying Mr. Rex Gold,' I said, carefully pronouncing my words. 'I know you like these snappy little gossip items, Russell. You've heard of Mr. Re

Well, she's marrying him. She's marrying him so she can make good pictures and educate the lower classes.' I leaned on the banister rail. 'Do you think the lower classes want to be educated? Do you think the sacrifice is worth while? I don't. I don't think they give a goddamn whether she marries Gold or whether they have better pictures. But you can't argue with women.'

Russell looked as if I had hit him in the face. He tried to say something, but words would not come. I left him and took the elevator to the street.

I got in the car.

'You poor guy,' I said to myself. 'I feel so sorry for you.'

Then I pressed the starter and drove to the Writers' Club.

The usual crowd was not in the club today. I said hello to the steward and went into the bar.

'A double Scotch,' I said, pulling up a stool and sitting down.

'Yes, Mr. Thurston,' the bartender said. 'Would you like a little ice?'

'Listen,' I leaned forward, 'if I wanted ice, I'd ask for ice. I don't want a lot of talk from you or anyone else.'

'Certainly, Mr. Thurston,' he said, going red.

I drank the whisky neat and shoved the glass back at him. 'I'll have it again without ice and without a lot of talk. You don't even have to mention the weather.'

'Certainly, Mr. Thurston.'

If I did not sell Gold my story I would be like this guy before long. I would be so hard up for money that I would have to take anything anyone liked to hand out to me.

I finished my whisky. 'Fill it up again.'

Just then Peter and Frank Imgram came in.

It was too bad that they had to come in at that moment because I was very angry and rather drunk. I got off my stool.

Peter smiled at me. 'Hello there, Clive,' he said. 'Have one with me? You know Frank Imgram, don't you?'

I know him all right.

'Sure,' I said and took a step backwards and got into position. 'The Hollywood gossip writer, isn't he?' And I let

Imgram have it, full in the mouth. He fell back and gurgled and reached fingers in his mouth to keep from choking on his bridgework. He may have written *The Land is Barren*, but his teeth weren't his own. That was something I had over him.

I didn't wait to see what happened. I just walked out of the bar. I went through the lobby and into the street. I got into my car and started the engine. I had to control myself because I wanted to go back and hit the little louse again. I wanted to hit him again so badly that I ached behind my eyes and nose and at the back of my neck.

I thought: Merle Bensinger, Carol, dear, sweet Carol and now Frank Imgram . . . possibly Peter Tennett. They would all hate my guts now. I was certainly making a mess of things. If I went on like this I would be getting quite a name for myself.

I drove fast down Sunset Boulevard. In a few days, perhaps, no one would want to talk to me. Perhaps I would have to resign from the Club. Never mind, I said to myself, you still have Eve. I slowed down, because I suddenly wanted to talk to Eve. That was something no one was going to do anything about. They might stop me from beating up Imgram, but they certainly would not stop me telephoning Eve.

I pulled up outside a drugstore, left my car and went in.

I had trouble with the dial. I was tighter than I thought. I mis-dialled three times before I got it right. By that time I was sweating and angry.

Marty came on the line.

'Miss Marlow,' I said.

'Who is that?'

What the hell was it to do with her? Why didn't Eve answer the telephone herself? Did she think I wanted to talk to her servant every time I called? Did she think I wanted to give my name to a servant who would tell the milkman, the iceman and all the guys she got drunk with?

'The man in the moon,' I said, 'that's who it is.'

There was a pause, then she said, 'I'm sorry, but Miss Marlow's out.'

'No, she isn't,' I said, angrily. 'Not at this time, she isn't. Tell her I want to talk to her.'

'What name shall I give?'

'Oh, for God's sake, Mr. Clive . . . now are you happy?'

'I'm so sorry, but Miss Marlow's engaged.'

'Engaged?' I repeated stupidly. 'But it's not yet two o'clock. How can she be engaged?'

'I'm sorry,' she said again. 'I will tell her you called.'

'Now wait a minute,' I said, feeling sick and empty, 'you mean she has some guy with her?'

'I will tell her you called,' Marty said and hung up.

I dropped the receiver and left it swinging on its cord. I felt like hell.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I CAME out of a heavy sleep to find Russell drawing the curtains. I sat up with a groan, aware that my head was aching and my tongue was like a strip of leather.

'Mr. Tennett's asking to see you, sir,' Russell said, plodding over to stand at the foot of the bed. His fat face was full of foreboding.

Then I remembered Imgram.

'Oh hell,' I said, flopping back on my pillow. 'What's the time?'

'It's just after ten thirty.' He continued to look accusingly at me.

'Do come off your highhorse, Russell,' I exclaimed. 'I suppose you've heard what happened at the Writers' Club?'

'I did, sir,' he said, compressing his lips. 'I am very sorry to hear about it.'

'I bet you are,' I said, wishing my head did not ache so violently. I must have got pretty drunk when I had returned to the apartment. I could not even remember going to bed. 'The little louse asked for it.'

Russell cleared his throat. 'Mr. Tennett's waiting, sir,' he reminded me.

I groaned. 'Very well. Tell him to wait. But I've no idea what he can do. I don't think there's anything anyone can do.'

When he had gone away, I got up and crawled into the bathroom. A cold shower eased my aching head. After I had shaved, I mixed myself a brandy and soda and by the time I had dressed I felt more myself.

I found Peter in the sitting room.

'Hello,' I said, going to the sideboard and mixing myself another brandy and soda. 'I was sleeping. Sorry to have kept you waiting.'

'That's all right,' he said.

'Drink?'

He shook his head.

I came over and sat down on the settee near him. There was an awkward pause. We looked at each other and then looked away.

'It's about Imgram of course?' I said.

'Well, yes, it's about Imgram. I suppose you were tight?'

'Do I have to defend myself?' I demanded, trying to keep calm about the whole thing, but feeling my temper rising.

'Don't think I'm here to criticize,' he said quickly. 'Although I must admit I'm surprised you could have done such a thing. I came to tell you that Gold intends to sue you.'

I stared at him. 'Gold intends to sue me?' I repeated. That was something I had not expected to hear.

Peter nodded. 'I'm afraid so. You see Imgram's hurt. He won't be able to work for some days. The delay's going to cust the Studio money and Gold's furious.'

I felt a sudden stab of satisfaction. At least, I had hurt the little louse,' I see,' I said.

'I thought I'd better come round and talk to you,' Peter went on. He was uneasy and embarrassed and I could see by his expression that he found the whole business very distasteful. 'R.G. say it'll cost him a hundred thousand.'

'Quite an expensive punch,' I returned, feeling suddenly cold and scared. 'He wasn't thinking of suing me for that amount, was he?'

'Technically speaking, he couldn't sue you at all. Imgram would have to do that,' Peter explained. He stared down at his perfectly polished shoes, then added, 'R.G.'s seen Imgram.'

'So he's seen Imgram.' I drank half the drandy and soda. It did not taste so good. 'And Imgram's going to sue me for a hundred thousand dollars? I don't think he'll get the money.'

Peter carefully touched off his cigarette ash with his little finger. 'Imgram won't sue you,' he said. 'He told Gold he wouldn't.'

I put my glass down. 'What's the idea?'

'I don't know,' Peter said frankly. 'I think I would have sued you. It was a pretty filthy thing to do, wasn't it, Clive?'

I waved that aside. 'Do you mean he's turning the other cheek?'

Peter nodded. 'Something like that.'

I got to my feet. 'Why the greasy little beast!' I exclaimed furiously. 'He can't treat me like that. Let him sue! Do you think I care? Do you think I care what he does?'

'Look here, Clive, you'd better sit down. You've done enough harm as it is without adding to it. What's the matter with you? Do you realize that Carol's gone to pieces?'

I stood over him. 'Now look, Peter, I don't have to take anything from you. That's one thing I am sure of. So keep out of this. Keep right out of it.'

'I wish I could,' Peter said, lifting his hands in a despairing gesture. 'Do you think I like any of it? You don't seem to realize how serious this is. You're up against Gold. Anything that effects Gold affects the Studio. That punch has caused a lot of trouble. I don't know why you did it. Probably you had every reason for punching Imgram. I don't know and I don't want to know. It's done now and it's upset our working schedule. To add to our troubles, Carol's gone haywire. She can't concentrate and I believe you're at the bottom of it all.'

I sat down again. 'It looks as if everything's going to be blamed on to me,' I said bitterly. 'What the hell am I going to do?'

'I think you'd better get out of town for a few days,' Peter said. 'Can't you go to Three Point? I don't want you to run into R.G. . . . not in his present mood. You see Imgram won't take any action and we're trying to persuade R.G. to leave you alone. At the moment, Clive, he's after your blood.'

If that's the way he's feeling, I thought, then it looks like curtains for my film script.

'I can't leave town just now,' I said, after a moment's thought. 'I've too much on hand, but I'll be careful to keep out of his way.'

Peter looked worried. 'It'll probably work out,' he said, getting to his feet. 'I'd better be getting over to the Studio. We're

in a frightful mess at the moment and R.G.'s like a bear with a sore head. Be a good chap and lie low for a few days.'

'I will,' I promised. 'By the way, Peter, you know I'm working on a story for Gold. Do you think this'll upset it?'

Peter shrugged. 'It may. It depends how long we are held up. If it blows over quickly and the story's good, then it should be all right. R.G.'s a business man. He's not likely to pass up a good story. But it has, of course, to be outstanding.'

'Yes.' I walked with him to the door, feeling depressed and worried. I began to realize what a fool I had been to have punched Imgram. It might easily influence my future career.

'Can you do anything about Carol?' Peter asked abruptly.

'I guess not.'

He looked steadily at me and I felt suddenly ashamed.

'She loves you, Clive,' he said quietly. 'She's a great kid and she doesn't deserve to be treated like this. There was a time when I thought you two were serious about each other. I know it's not my business, but I hate seeing her go to pieces.'

I didn't say anything.

He stood hesitating, then said with a little shrug, 'Well, I'm sorry. Perhaps she'll get over it. Good-bye, Clive. Lie low for a while. I'm sure it'll blow over if you're careful.'

'Sure,' I said. 'And thanks for coming.'

When he had gone I returned to the sitting room and had another drink. I wanted to go to Carol, but, somehow I just could not bring myself to face her. I had hurt her and was sure that if I went to her now, my task would be much harder than if I gave her time to recover. Besides, I had too much on my mind. I was not worried about Imgram, but I was worried about Gold. He could be dangerous if he wanted to be. I sat down and thought about it. Perhaps I should see him and try to explain, but I finally decided that Peter knew best. I would have to make up my mind to keep out of sight until things quieted down.

I looked angrily round the big sitting room, knowing that I could not bear the idea of spending day after day caged in these four walls. I would go mad. It was not as if I could settle down

with a book as I did in the old days. Hollywood had made me restless and the thought of being alone, even for a few hours, was intolerable.

I glanced at my watch. It was eleven forty-five. Then I thought of Eve. She would be in bed – probably asleep. I knew what I was going to do. I would call on her and persuade her to have lunch with me. As soon as I had decided to do this, I felt a great surge of relief. Eve would be the solution to my loneliness. As long as I had her I did not care what happened.

I reached Laurel Canyon Drive a few minutes after noon. I pulled up outside Eve's house, left the car and walked quickly down the path. I knocked and stood waiting.

The door was opened almost immediately and Eve stood there, blinking in the strong sunlight. She stared at me. 'Clive!' she said and giggled. 'I thought you were the milkman.' She had obviously just got out of bed. Her hair was ruffled and she was without make-up. 'What on earth are you doing here at this time?'

I smiled down at her. 'Hello, Eve,' I said. 'I thought I'd give you a surprise. Can I come in?'

She pulled her dressing gown about her and yawned. 'I was just going to take a bath. Oh Clive, you are the limit. You might, at least, have phoned.'

I followed her into her bedroom. The room smelt faintly of perfume and stale perspiration. She went over and jerked open the windows.

'Phew! It stinks in here, doesn't it?' she said, sitting on the bed and scratching her head. 'Oh I'm tired.'

I sat on the bed close to her. 'You look as if you've had a hectic night,' I said. 'What have you been up to?'

'Do I look awful?' she asked, rolling back on the pillow and stretching. 'I don't care. I don't care about anything this morning.'

'I feel like that too. That's why I came to see you,' I said, looking down at her white, pinched face. There were smudges under her eyes and the two lines above the bridge of her nose were very pronounced. 'Let's be bored together. Come and have lunch with me.'

She screwed up her face. 'No,' she said, 'I can't be bothered.'

'Now, don't be obstinate,' I said. 'We'll have an early lunch and then you can come back here if you want to. Come on, don't be a crab.'

She looked up at me and there was hesitation in her eyes. 'Oh I don't know,' she said, a sulky expression darkening her face. 'It's such a bore to get dressed. No, Clive, I don't think I will.'

I reached down and took her hands, pulling her up so that our bodies were close. 'You're coming,' I said firmly. 'I want to see you in your clothes for a change. Now, what will you wear?'

She pulled away from me and slouched over to the wardrobe. 'I don't know,' she said and yawned again. 'Ooh I'm tired and I don't want to go out.'

I opened the wardrobe. Hanging from the centre rail were a half a dozen tailored suits from various patterns.

'Why not wear a dress?' I asked. 'Why must you always dress so severely? I'd like to see you in something flimsy and feminine for a change.'

'At least, Clive, let me decide what suits me,' she said, pulling a pin head grey suit off the hanger. 'I'll wear this. All right?'

'Sure, now go ahead and take your bath,' I said, sitting on the bed. 'I'll smoke a cigarette and wait for you.'

'I won't be long,' she said, closing the cupboard.

While she was upstairs in the bathroom, I wandered around the little room. I opened drawers, glanced inside, then closed them. I moved the glass animals and in doing so I thought about her husband. There was a dark secret atmosphere about the room and I could not help thinking of the many men who came here. Secretive, furtive men who would be ashamed if their friends knew where they had been.

I was worried by these thoughts and I began to feel angry and frustrated. I hated to think that so many men shared Eve with me. The whole atmosphere of the room finally became so unbearable that I went into the passage and called to her to hurry.

'I'm coming,' she said. 'Don't be so impatient!'

At this moment I heard the front door open and Marty came in.

She gave me a quick, surprised look and then she smiled. 'Good morning, sir,' she said. 'It's a lovely morning, isn't it?'

'Yes,' I returned, not looking at her.

I hated seeing her. I hated her servile, knowing expression. I wondered if Eve told her about me. I wondered if these two women discussed the men who came to this little house and whether they sniggered about them. I could not stay in the same room with this woman, suspecting that sometimes she sniggered about me.

'Tell Miss Marlow I'll be in the car,' I said curtly and let myself out of the house.

Eve joined me in less than half an hour. She was smart and trim, but in the hard sunlight I thought she looked older and a little tired.

I opened the car door and she slid in. We looked at each other.

'Do I look all right?'

I smiled at her. 'Wonderful.'

'Don't lie. Do I really look all right?'

'You could go anywhere, Eve, and with anyone.'

'Do you really mean that?'

'Of course. The trouble with you is you're ashame[illegible] you do,' I said, stubbing the self-starter. 'That's [illegible] reasons for your inferiority complex. You want it [illegible] don't you? Well, so far, it's all right. You have nothing [illegible] about.'

She looked searchingly at me, decided that I was tell[illegible] truth and sank back against the cushions. 'Thank you,' she [illegible] with a little nod. 'Where are we going?'

'Nikabob's,' I said, turning into Sunset and going in the [illegible]rection of Franklin. 'All right?'

'Mmmm, I suppose so.'

'I tried to call you yesterday at two o'clock, but Marty said you were engaged.'

She grimaced, but did not say anything.

'You must work all day and all night,' I said, secretly torturing myself.

'Don't let's talk about it,' she said shortly. 'I wonder why you ien must always talk about it.'

'Sorry . . . I was forgetting it was shop to you.' I drove in ilence for a couple of blocks and then said, 'You puzzle me, ive. You're not really hard, are you?'

She pursed her mouth. 'Why do you say that?'

'I think you could easily be hurt.'

'But, I'd never let you know,' she countered quickly.

'You're an oddity. You're always on guard against an unkind vord. You think everyone is your enemy. I wish you'd relax nd accept me as a friend.'

'I don't want friends,' she returned impatiently. 'Anyway, I iever trust men. I know too much about them.'

'That's because you know only the rottenness in men. Won't ou let me be your friend?'

She looked at me indifferently. 'No, I won't and do stop alking such nonsese. You can never mean anything to me. I eep telling you, so why don't you stop?'

It seemed pretty hopeless to me. Again I felt the dark stir-ing of frustrated anger against her. If there were only some-hing I could do to move her, to get behind that cold, ompletely indifferent attitude she hid behind.

'Well, you're blunt enough,' I said. 'At least, I know where I im.'

'I wish I knew what you were up to,' she said, giving me a earching look. 'There's something going on behind all this moothness. What do you want, Clive?'

'You,' I said simply. 'I like you. You intrigue me. I want to eel that I've a place in your life. That's all.'

'Oh, you're crazy,' she said impatiently. 'You must know iundreds of women. Why bother with me?'

Yes . . . why bother with her? Why bother with her when I iad Carol? Why waste my time beating against a stone wall vhen every time I met her it became clearer that she would iever accept me? I did not know. But I had to go on, although I inew that unless something unexpected happened we would ilways be on the same hopeless footing.

'Never mind the other women,' I said, pulling up outside

Nikabob's. 'They don't count. It's you that matters.'

She made an impatient gesture with her hands. 'You must be crazy,' she said. 'I've told you you mean nothing to me. I can't keep telling you, can I? You mean absolutely nothing to me and you never will mean anything to me.'

I got out of the car and walked stiffly round to open the door for her. 'All right,' I said. 'What have you got to worry about? And besides, if you're so sure about that, why do you come out with me?'

She gave me a quick, hard look. For a moment I thought I had gone too far and that she was going to leave me flat. Then she suddenly giggled.

'Well, I've got to live, haven't I?'

I felt the blood leave my face, but I did not pause nor look at her. We entered Nikabob's and sat down at a table away from the entrance.

Everything that I suspected and did not wish to admit was in that one damnable sentence. 'Well, I've got to live, haven't I?'

After I had given the order I told the waiter to bring me a bottle of Scotch. I wanted a drink badly. We did not speak until the whisky came.

'You're a cold blooded little thing, aren't you?' I said, pouring out two large drinks.

'Do you think so?' She looked bored.

It was all going wrong. I would have to make an effort if the lunch was going to be at all successful. It was no use leaving it to her.

'Heard from Jack?' I asked, abruptly changing the subject.

'I hear every week.'

'Is he all right?'

'Mmmm . . . he's fine.'

'Coming home?'

'Mmmm.'

'How long will he stay?'

'Oh . . . a week . . . ten days, I don't know.'

'So I shan't see you?'

She shook her head. There was a blank faraway look in her

eyes and I felt she was scarcely listening to what I was saying.

'I would like to meet your husband,' I said deliberately.

She looked at me sharply. 'Would you?'

'Why not?'

'You would like him.' Her eyes became animated. 'Everyone likes him . . . but, I'm the only one who really knows him. They think he's such a nice person.' She pretended to sneer, but it did not come off. 'It infuriates me sometimes to see the way people flock around him . . . if they only knew how he treated me.' I could see she did not mind how he treated her. Whatever he did would be all right with her. I could see that in every line in her face and in the expression in her eyes.

'Well, do we meet?'

'All right. I'll speak to him.'

The waiter brought lobster soup. It was very good, but Eve scarcely touched it.

'You're not eating.'

She lifted her shoulders. 'I'm not hungry. After all I've only just got up.'

I pushed my plate impatiently away. 'Are you sorry you came?'

'No . . . I wouldn't have come if I hadn't wanted to.'

'You've never learned to say anything complimentary, have you?'

'I don't need to. You can take me as I am, or leave me.'

'Do you always treat your men like this?'

'Why not?'

'Not very wise, is it?'

'Well, they always come back. Why should I worry?'

She had no need to worry. I knew she was speaking the truth. If her other men were like me, then they always would come back.

I looked at her. The arrogant expression in her eyes made me want to hurt her. 'You know best, of course,' I said evenly, 'but after all it's not as if you're getting any younger. A time'll come when they won't come back.'

Her mouth twisted and she shrugged. 'It's too late to learn

new tricks now,' she said. 'I've never run after any one yet and I don't intend to start now.'

'You know, Eve,' I went on. 'I don't think you're happy. This is a pretty ghastly kind of life you lead, isn't it? Why don't you give it up?'

'You're all the same,' she said. 'They all say that, but they don't do anything about it. Besides, what do you think I'd do? Become a drudge around the house? Not me!'

'Is Jack going to keep travelling? Isn't there a chance that he'd make a home for you?'

She looked past me across the room. Her eyes softened as she brooded. 'We had planned to open a road-house.' She lifted her shoulders rather hopelessly. 'Oh, I don't know.'

The waiter brought the second course and then when he had gone away, she said suddenly, 'You wouldn't believe it, but I cried last night.' She looked quickly at me to see if I were going to laugh at her. 'You wouldn't think I'd do that, would you?'

'Why did you?'

'I was lonely . . . I'd had a rotten day.' Her face tightened. 'You don't know how rotten some men can be. You don't know how lonely this life is. You can't trust anyone. They're all after what they can get.'

'Of course, it's a rotten life,' I said. 'No good can possibly come from it. Can't you earn money in some other way?'

Her face became cold and wooden. 'No,' she snapped. 'How can I? I'm a fool to grumble, only I just feel low today.' She drew a deep breath and said, 'How I hate men!'

'Something's upset you. What is it?'

'Oh, nothing. Never mind, Clive, I'm not going to talk about it.'

'Someone treated you badly last night.'

'Yes. He tried to gyp me . . .' She snapped her fingers irritably, 'I'm not going to talk about it.'

'I hope he didn't get away with it,' I said curious to know what happened.

Her eyes showed deep anger and spite. 'He didn't and he'll never be allowed in my house again.' She suddenly pushed her

plate away. 'We'd better go back.' She had only picked at her food.

I beckoned to the waiter. 'Look, Eve,' I said, 'Let's have lunch or dinner together from time to time. It'll be good for you. I want you to treat me as a friend. Maybe you don't think you want a friend, but it does give you a chance to unbottle. I'm trying to treat you like a human being. None of your other men treat you like that, do they?'

For a moment she looked a little startled, then she said, 'No, I suppose they don't.'

'Well, will you? Can't you see that a little time off from all this muck will be good for you?'

She pursed her mouth. 'All right,' she said, then she brightened a little. 'Thank you, Clive. Yes, I'd like to.'

I felt as if I had won a major battle.'That's fine,' I said. 'I'll call you next week and we'll get together.'

I paid the bill and we went back to the car.

As we turned into Laurel Canyon Drive, she said, 'I've enjoyed this. You're odd, aren't you, Clive?'

I laughed. 'Am I? Only in comparison with the other men you know. You still think I want something from you. I don't. You intrigue me. I like having you around.'

We stopped outside her house. I got out and we stood by the car. 'You're coming in?' she said, smiling at me.

I shook my head. 'No . . . I won't today. It's been nice, Eve. I want you to come again.'

She stood looking at me. The smile was still on her lips, but it had gone from her eyes. 'Don't you want to come in?'

'I want to be your friend,' I said. 'I'll take you out next week, but I don't want to treat you as other men treat you.'

Her eyes were very cold now, but the smile still persisted. 'I see,' she said. 'All right. Thank you, Clive, for the lunch.'

This was, for me, a crucial moment. I could see she was disappointed and annoyed that I was not going to pay her for her company. I could clearly read that in her eyes. If I were to continue on the lines I had planned, I would have to reach this point sooner or later. In spite of what she had said as we had entered the restaurant, I was determined to go through with it.

I was not going to be like Harvey Barrow and pay for her company. I would give her a good time; I would listen to her talk about Jack and about her troubles, but I was not going to give her any more money.

'You'll call me then?' she said.

'I will. Good-bye, Eve, and don't cry any more.'

She turned from me and walked quickly to the house.

I returned to the car, lit a cigarette and started the engine. Then I drove slowly down the street and, as I turned the corner, I saw a man walking towards me. For a moment I did not recognize him, then I noticed the long arms that seemed to reach almost to his knees. I looked quickly at him as I drove past. It was Harvey Barrow.

I pulled to the curb and stopped. What was Harvey Barrow doing in this district? I knew, of course, but I refused to admit that he was going to see Eve.

I slid out of the car and ran back. Turning the corner I could see him walk purposely down Laurel Canyon Drive. He slowed down outside Eve's house and stood hesitating at the gate.

I wanted to shout at him. I wanted to break into a run, reach him and slam my fist into his ugly, brutal face. But, instead, I just stood there, watching. He pushed open the gate and walked quickly down the short path to the house.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I HAD forgotten Harvey Barrow. He had seemed to me to be such a cheap, insignificant creature that I had dismissed him from my mind after I had driven him from Three Point. It did not occur to me that he would again associate with Eve. She had treated him so ruthlessly and I had so humiliated him before her that it was inconceivable that he could ever again face her. Yet there he was, going to her, sharing her with me, and bringing me down to his own sordid level.

I was still feeling shocked and depressed as I opened my front door. Russell came down the passage to meet me. One look at his worried face told me that more trouble was on the way.

'Miss Bensinger's waiting to see you, sir,' he announced.

I stared at him. 'Waiting to see me?' I repeated. 'How long has she been here?'

'She has only this moment arrived. She said it was urgent and she would wait ten minutes.'

I wondered why Merle Bensinger had come all the way from her office to see me. It must obviously be urgent and important as she scarcely ever left her desk.

'All right,' Russell,' I said, handing him my hat. 'I'll see her at once.'

I walked into the sitting room. 'Hel-lo, Merle,' I said, going to her. 'This is a surprise.'

Merle Bensinger was big, red haired and tough. She carried her forty years well and there was no smarter business woman in Hollywood. She had planted herself before the empty fireplace and she looked at me with stormy eyes.

'If *this* is a surprise you'd better get yourself some brandy,' she said, ignoring my hand and sitting down on the arm of the settee, 'because you'll certainly need it.'

'Now look, Merle,' I began, 'I'm sorry about the Digest article . . .'

'Never mind the Digest article,' she snapped. 'You've enough grief without bringing that up.' She fumbled in her handbag and produced a battered packet of Camels, 'I haven't much time, so we'll get right down to business. Just tell me one thing . . . did you punch Frank Imgram?'

I ran my fingers through my hair. 'Suppose I did? What's it to you?'

'He asks what's it to me?' Merle raised her eyes beseechingly to the ceiling. 'That's a laugh. He socks the biggest money making proposition in Hollywood, breaks his bridgework, and asks what's it to me?' She regarded me, her green eyes almost savage. 'Listen, Thurston, you've been dumb. You've been so goddamn dumb that I can't imagine what kind of parents produced you. The Digest was pretty bad, but this . . . well, it's murder!'

'Come on,' I said impatiently, 'just how bad is it?'

She threw her cigarette away and walked over to the window. 'Couldn't be worse, Thurston. You're up against the biggest toughest guy in pictures . . . Gold. He's out to break you and he'll do it. Between you and me and my dog's fleas you might just as well pack your bag and skip. As far as Hollywood's concerned . . . you're out!'

I went to the sideboard and mixed myself a strong highball. I felt I needed it.

'Make that out in duplicate,' Merle snapped. 'Do you think you're the only one with nerves?'

I gave her a whisky and sat down. 'How about that contract between me and Gold?' I said. 'You're not going to let him get away with that?'

Merle shook her head hopelessly. 'The way this guy talks,' she said, addressing a vase filled with carnations. 'Contract! He thinks he's got a contract,' She swept round on me. 'I couldn't hold a blind, half-witted baby of two months to a contract like that. It means absolutely nothing. If Gold doesn't like the story, it's out.'

'Maybe he will like it,' I said uneasily. 'Don't tell me Gold'd be dopey enough to turn down a good story just to get even with me.'

She looked at me pityingly. 'Don't you understand your drunken frolic has cost Gold something like a hundred grand? A story's got to be mighty good to make a guy like Gold forget a hundred grand. If you ask me I don't believe there's a writer in Hollywood who could make him forget all that money.'

I finished my drink and lit a cigarette. 'Well,' I said, trying not to feel scared, 'What do I do? You're my agent. Can't you suggest anything?'

'There's nothing to suggest. Gold's blacklisted you and that's all there is to it. You'll have to write novels. The stage and movies are out.'

'Oh, no,' I said, suddenly angry. 'He can't do that to me. Why, it's crazy . . .'

'Maybe it is, but I know what he can do. Gold's the one guy in Hollywood I can't handle.' She suddenly snapped her fingers. 'But there is someone who could do it.'

I stared at her. 'Do what? What are you talking about?'

'Put you right with Gold again.'

'Who?'

'Your girl friend . . . Carol Rae.'

I stood up. 'And what the hell do you mean by that?'

She waved me to my chair. 'Now don't get upset,' she said soothingly. 'Carol Rae could fix it for you. She and Gold are like that.' She crossed her fingers.

'Since when?' I asked, hardly trusting my voice.

Merle stared at me. 'You know Gold wants to marry her, don't you?'

'I know that, but it doesn't mean anything.'

'It doesn't? What's the matter with you? Let me tell you something. Gold's never been married. He's nearly sixty. Suddenly he falls for a girl and you say it means nothing. It means everything to Gold. A guy his age when he falls, comes down like a ton of pig-iron dropped from the Empire State building. Right now, that girl could do what she liked with Gold. I tell you . . . she could even fix you.'

I drew a deep breath and controlled my temper with an effort that made me sweat. 'Well, okay, Merle, thanks for the tip. I'll think it over.' How I kept my hands off her I don't

know, but I knew I couldn't afford to make any more enemies. 'I'll watch it.'

She got up. 'You'd better do more than that, Thurston,' she said. 'I've told you how to handle it. It's up to you now. If I were you, I'd drop this film script and get a novel out. Already some of your creditors have been on to me to know whether you're on a spot with Gold. I've stalled them; but that won't last long.

I was too dumbfounded to do anything but stare at her.

'And another thing,' she said, turning back from the door, 'What's all this about you going around with a tart?'

I felt myself flinch. 'I've taken enough from you, Merle, for one morning. You keep your snout out of my business,' I snapped, turning away.

She eyed me and then raised her hands in a gesture of hopeless exasperation. 'Then it's true?' she said. 'Are you crazy? Aren't there enough women in this cesspool of glamour without picking on a floozie? They're talking about you, Thurston. No writer can afford that kind of scandal. Pull yourself together, for God's sake, or you and me'll have to part.'

Blobd drained from my face. 'Hollywood's not going to dictate to me!' I said furiously. 'And that goes for you too, Merle! I'll damn well please myself who I associate with and if you don't like it, you know what you can do.'

'What a sucker you are,' she said, her own temper rising. 'I thought you and me could make money, but I was wrong. Okay, if that's how you feel. It means nothing to me because you're on the slide. You know me, Thurston, I'm frank. If you continue to kick around with this woman your name's going to stink like a month-old corpse. Get wise. If you can't do without her, for the love of Mike, don't flaunt her before the public. Keep her out of sight.'

I was so angry I could have hit her. 'So long, Merle,' I said, opening the door. 'There's plenty other vultures who'll be glad to handle my affairs. As far as I'm concerned, you're through.'

'So long,' she returned. 'Watch your nickels, Thurston, you'll need 'em.'

She was gone before I could think of a suitable reply.

I began to pace up and down. What did she mean about m creditors? I did not owe any big amounts. What did she mean I rang for Russell.

'Have we any outstanding bills, Russell?' I asked when h came.

'There are a few, sir,' he said, his eyebrows crawling to the top of his forehead. 'I thought you kept check on them.'

I gave him a hard look and then went over to the desk. I opened one of the drawers and took out an assorted bundle of papers.

'You should have watched this, Russell,' I said angrily. 'You can't expect me to do everything in this damned apartment.'

'But I've never seen this lot before, sir,' Russell protested. 'If I'd known they were here . . .'

'All right, all right,' I said irritably, knowing that he was right. I had been in the habit of putting all my bills in this drawer, promising myself to have a grand settling up at the end of the month. Somehow, I never got around to going through them.

I sat down at the desk.

'Here, get a pencil and paper and write the amounts down as I call them,' I said.

'Is – is anything wrong, sir?' Russell asked, suddenly anxious.

'Just do as I say and for God's sake stop talking.'

At the end of a quarter of an hour, I found I owed thirteen housand dollars to various stores and tailors.

I looked at Russell. 'Not so good,' I said with a grimace. 'No, t's certainly not so good.'

'Well, at least, they'll wait, sir,' he said, stroking his chin neasily. 'It's just as well Mr. Gold has given you an offer, isn't ? I mean you can't go on much longer like this. I ought . . .'

'Never mind what you thought,' I broke in. 'You're not paid think, Russell. Okay, beat it. I've got things to do.'

When he had gone I took out my bank book. I had fifteen

thousand dollars in hand. If what Merle had said was true and my creditors were getting anxious, I would be down to nothing in no time. As I put the bank book away I noticed my hand was shaking.

For the first time since I had come to Hollywood I suddenly experienced a feeling of doubt. Up to now, with *Rain Check* bringing in a steady income, and my books selling well I had been confident of the future. But the play and the books could not go on forever. I simply had to make a success of this story for Gold. There were no two ways about it.

I spent the next three days trying to work out the blue print of my script. I worked hard, but at the end of the third day I found I had produced nothing of value. The main reason why my work was abortive was that, for the first time in my life, I knew that I *had* to succeed. This feeling created a spark of panic which finally prevented me thinking clearly and as I became more and more worried I found myself filling pages with meaningless words.

I finally pushed the typewriter aside, mixed myself a stiff whisky and soda and began to pace the room.

I looked at the clock. It was ten minutes past seven. Almost without thinking, I reached for the telephone and called Eve.

She answered immediately. 'Hello.'

A great weight rolled from my mind when I heard her voice. I knew then that I had been wanting to call her for the past two days. I needed her to share my loneliness and through her, I wanted to regain my lost confidence in myself.

'Hello,' I said. 'How are you?'

'I'm all right, Clive. And you?'

'Fine. Look Eve, will you have dinner with me? Can I come round right now?'

'No . . . you can't.'

My mind grew dark and heavy again.

'Now don't say that. I want to see you.'

'I can't.'

'But I want to see you tonight,' I persisted, feeling blood mounting to my head.

'I can't tonight, Clive.'

Couldn't she at least say she was sorry? I thought, furious with her. 'You mean you've a dinner date?'

'Yes . . . if you must know.'

'All right . . . all right . . . I still want to see you. Can't you cancel it?'

'No.'

I nearly slammed down the receiver, but thinking of the long hours I had on my hands, I tried again. 'Wouldn't it be possible to meet you after your dinner date?' I thought if she said no to that God knows what I'm going to do.

'Well I might,' she said reluctantly. 'Do you really want to see me?'

What did she think I was crawling on my hands and knees for? 'Yes,' I said. 'What time shall we say?'

'About nine thirty?'

'Suppose you call me when you're back? Then I'll come on over.'

'All right.'

I gave her my number.

'Then about nine thirty. I'll wait here for you.'

'All right,' and she hung up.

I put the receiver down. There had been no encouragement in that conversation. It had been flat, depressing and impersonal, but I did not care. I had to see her. It was like grinding down on an aching tooth, but I knew I could not face another night alone.

Russell came in as I was brooding about her. He glanced at me, then at the litter on my desk and his mouth pursed.

'All right, Russell,' I said irritably. 'Don't look like a bishop. Things aren't so good. In fact, everything's going to hell.'

His eyebrows began to crawl up his forehead. 'I'm sorry to hear that, sir,' he said. 'Is there anything particularly wrong?'

'I'm not getting the breaks,' I went on, after a pause. 'Carol's left me, Miss Bensinger's quit, I can't get going with my story and I'm in debt. That's my hell for today. How do you like it?'

He rubbed his bald head with the palm of his hand. 'I don't know what's come over you, Mr. Clive,' he said. 'At one time you used to be working all hours of the day. Now, you haven't worked for I don't know how long. It's been worrying me. If you don't mind my saying so ever since you sent the book to that Miss Marlow, there's been nothing but trouble.'

'Everyone's trying to blame it on her,' I said, getting to my feet and pacing up and down. 'But you're all wrong. I don't know what I'd do without her.'

He permitted himself a respectful smile. 'I hope I have not offended you, Mr. Clive,' he said, taking out his handkerchief and mopping his forehead. I could see he was very earnest and embarrassed. 'I do hope, sir, you will give this woman up. She can do you no good in the long run. There's Miss Carol. She's a fine young lady, if I may say so. Why don't you see her? Why don't you tell her what has happened and ask her to help you? She won't desert you if she's sure you really want her.'

I thought of my date with Eve. It was no good. I had to see Eve tonight. It was no good listening to Russell. Perhaps he was right, but even if he was, I could not draw back now that I was making some progress with Eve.

'I'll think about it, Russell,' I said, getting to my feet. 'Maybe it'll come out all right. I don't know. Maybe I will see Carol. Right now I feel it's hopeless, but I may change my mind by tomorrow.' I began to wander round the room. 'Be a good fellow and get me some supper, will you? I shan't be going out until late.'

He got to his feet, giving me a quick, shrewd look. I saw his lips compress and his face clouded with gloom, but he went off without saying anything further.

I felt a sudden affection for him. I was sure that he meant well and was genuinely worried about me. In my present mood, it was comforting to think at least someone cared about me.

I was restless for the next hour and as the minute hand crept round the face of the clock, I became increasingly nervy.

I glanced at the clock again. It was nine thirty-seven. Of course, I told myself, I could not expect her to be punctual, but any moment now the bell would ring.

I could no longer concentrate on my book and I sat waiting, a cigarette between my fingers and a sick hollow emptiness in my stomach.

Russell looked in to see if I wanted anything. I waved him impatiently away.

'Shall they put your car away, sir?'

'No. I'm going out any minute now. Tell them to leave it.'

'Will that be all, sir?'

I restrained the temptation to shout at him. 'Yes, thank you, Russell,' I said with studied calm. 'Good night and don't fuss if I'm late.'

When he had gone, I was about to glance at the clock, but stopped myself in time. You wait until she calls, I said to myself. It's no use looking at the clock. That won't get you anywhere. She'll ring. She said she would and she will.

I closed my eyes and waited. I waited a long time, feeling doubt, disappointment and frustration gathering in my mind like a clot of blood. I even began to count and when I reached eight hundred I opened my eyes and looked at the clock. It was five minutes past ten.

I walked to the telephone, dialled her number and waited. I let the bell ring for a long time, but there was no answer. I hung up.

Damn her, I said, damn her to hell.

Then I poured myself a whisky and lit a cigarette. While I was doing this my mind crawled with cold, disappointed fury. I cursed her. All along she had been like this. Unreliable, selfish, indifferent. She had promised to call me. She had no thought that my evening would be spoilt. She just didn't care what happened to me.

At ten thirty I rang again, but there was still no reply.

I began to pace up and down, trembling with anger. She didn't care a damn. Independent, was she? I'd show the slut! I'd teach her to make a sucker out of me! Then I threw my cigarette away in frustrated disgust. How was I going to teach her? I couldn't even hurt her. There was not a damn thing I could do to her that'd make any difference. Not one single thing.

If I ever get you where I want you, Eve, I said to myself, I'll make you suffer for this.

Even as I said it, I knew that I would not get her where I wanted her. If we were to continue to know each other, I would be the one to suffer. I would be the one always to give way, because she did not give a damn and never would give a damn for me.

I called her number every ten minutes after that. I was determined to speak to her even if I continued to call her all night. At eleven thirty, she answered.

'Hello?'

'Eve . . .' I stopped because I could not put my thoughts into words. Rage, relief and hysterical exhaustion left me speechless.

'Oh hello, Clive.'

The flat, indifferent note in her voice galvanized me to say, 'I've been waiting. You said nine thirty. Look at the time. I've been waiting and waiting . . .'

'Have you?' There was a pause, then she said under her breath, 'God! I'm tight.'

'You're tight, are you?' I almost shouted at her. 'Haven't you any thought for me?'

'Oh Clive, stop it. I'm tired . . . I can't talk now.'

'But we were going to meet. Why did you do this?'

'Why not?' she snapped back. 'You take too much for granted. I tell you I'm tired . . .'

She'll hang up in a moment, I thought, in sudden panic. 'Wait, Eve, don't cut me off.' I was half crazy with rage, frustration and fear that I could not see her. 'If you're tired – well, I'm sorry, but couldn't you have just telephoned me? I've been waiting. I mean, after the week-end, couldn't you have treated me a little differently?'

'Oh do stop it!' she exclaimed. 'Come now if you want to. But don't keep on and on. It's not too late, is it? Come now and stop talking.'

Before I could say anything, she hung up.

I did not hesitate. Picking up my hat, I ran to the elevator. A few minutes later I was in my car speeding towards Laurel Canyon Drive.

It was a bright moonlight night and the traffic was heavy, but I reached her house in thirteen minutes.

She opened the door when I knocked.

'You're awful, Clive,' she said, leading the way into the bedroom. 'What's the matter with you? I only saw you a few days ago.'

I faced her, struggling to control my temper. She was wearing her blue dressing gown and a strong smell of whisky came from her. She peered at me, her eyes dazed, then she pulled a little face.

'Oh, God!' she said, yawning. 'I'm tired.'

She flopped across the bed, her head on the pillow and stared up at me. I could see she had difficulty in focusing.

I stood over her, feeling a sudden revulsion for her. 'You're drunk,' I said accusingly.

She put her hand to her head. 'I must be,' she said, yawning again. 'Anyway, I've had quite enough,' and she closed her eyes.

'How could you do this to me?' I burst out, wanting to shake her and go on shaking her. 'I've been waiting and waiting. Haven't you any feeling at all?'

She struggled up on her elbow, her face wooden and her eyes like wet stones. 'Feeling?' she repeated. 'For you? Why should I? Who do you think you are? I warned you, Clive. There's only one man I've any feeling for – that's Jack.'

'Oh, shut up about your goddamn Jack!' I said violently.

She suddenly giggled. 'If you could only see how silly you look,' she said and fell back onto the pillow again. 'Do sit down and stop standing over me like the wrath of God.'

I suddenly hated her. 'Where have you been all this time?'

'I couldn't get away. I was working. What's it to you anyway?'

'You mean you forgot all about me?'

'No, I didn't,' she giggled again. 'I remembered, but I thought it'd do your conceit good to wait. So I let you wait and now perhaps you won't take me so much for granted.'

I could have struck her. 'All right,' I said, 'If that's the way

you feel. I really don't know why I've come. I think I'd better go.'

She struggled up from the bed and put her arms round my neck. 'Don't be silly, Clive. Stay . . . I want you to stay.'

You mean you want my money, you rotten little slut, I thought and I pulled her arms away and shoved her back on the bed.

'You are in a state,' I said, stepping away from the bed. 'I didn't think, after the week-end, you could have treated me like this.'

She locked her hands behind her head and giggled up at me. 'Do stop pitying yourself. I warned you how it would be if you fell in love with me, didn't I? Now be nice and come to bed.'

I sat on the bed by her side. 'Do you think I'm in love with you? You don't give a damn anyway, do you?'

She pursed her lips and looked away from me. 'I'm sick of men falling in love with me. I don't want them. Why can't they leave me alone?'

'You might easily be left alone. If you treat all your men as you treat me, you deserve to be left.'

She shrugged. 'They come back. It doesn't matter how I treat them, they always come back, If they didn't, I wouldn't care. I'm independent, Clive. There are plenty of other fish.'

'You're only independent because you've got Jack,' I said, wanting to smack her face. 'Suppose something happened to him? What could you do then?'

Her face seemed to sag. 'I'd kill myself,' she returned. 'Why?'

'That's easy talk. But you wouldn't have the guts when the time came.'

'That's what you think,' she retorted, stung. 'I did try to kill myself once. I drank a bottle of Lysol. So you know what that means? It didn't kill me, but I was bringing up chunks of my inside for months.'

'Why did you do that?' I asked, momentarily shocked out of my anger.

'I'm not going to tell you. Come on, Clive, don't keep talking. Come to bed. I'm tired.'

Her spirit-laden breath fanned my cheek and I turned away, suddenly revolted. 'All right,' I said, anxious now only to find an excuse to get out of this disgusting little room. 'I'll stay. I shan't be a moment. I want to use the bathroom.'

As I moved to the door, she took off her dressing gown and slid between the sheets. 'Hurry up,' she said, closing her eyes and blowing through her lips.

I stood looking at the other pillow. There were faint grease marks on it and it was slightly soiled. So she was inviting me to sleep in sheets that had been used by some other man. That finally decided me. Without looking at her, I went upstairs to the bathroom and sitting on the side of the bath, I lit a cigarette. I knew this was the end between us and my first reaction was of overwhelming relief. I had seen her as she really was. I knew nothing that I did, nothing I said would make any difference to her feelings for me. I was, to her, merely a means of earning money. I might have put up with her heartlessness and her drunkardness, but the soiled bed killed my infatuation for her once and for all.

I remained in the little bathroom for some time and then I went downstairs and softly entered the bedroom.

Eve lay sprawled across the bed, her mouth open and her face flushed. As I looked down at her, she began to snore.

There was nothing in me now except a weak, drained feeling of disgust. I took two twenty dollar bills from my wallet and put them among the glass animals. Then I tip-toed out of the house and drove back to my apartment.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LYING in my bed, with the pale dawn sunlight coming through a gap in the curtains, I marvelled that my association with Eve had lasted so long. She had done everything in her power to destroy my feelings for her. She had behaved with incredible selfishness, and brutal indifference and it was only because I had been so utterly infatuated with her that the association had lasted as long as it had.

I had had a narrow escape. It frightened me to think what might have happened if I had continued to associate with her. And while I thought of this, I took time to consider my past life as a whole and I realized what an unscrupulous, dishonest fool I had been. I thought of John Couslon, I thought of Carol. I thought of Imgram. I thought of the many mean and cruel things I had done in the past and, in something like panic, I searched my memory for some deed that could go on the credit side of my page of self-judgment. I could think of nothing. At the age of forty I had not one single thing to be proud of – except perhaps one. I had walked out of Eve's life. Since I had been strong minded enough to do that surely there was still time for me to recover my self-respect and my position as a writer.

But I knew that the task was too overwhelming for me to undertake alone. There was one person who could help me. I must see Carol. I experienced a sudden feeling of tenderness and affection for her. I had treated her shamefully and I was determined I would never again hurt or grieve her. It was unthinkable that she should marry Gold. I would see her today.

I rang for Russell.

He came a few minutes later with my morning coffee which he put on the table by my bed.

'Russell,' I said, propping myself up on my elbow, 'I've been an incredible fool. I've been thinking about it half the night and

I'm going to pull myself together. I'm seeing Miss Rae this morning.'

He gave me a long searching look, raised his eyebrows and walked over to the windows to pull the curtains.

'I take it Miss Marlow was not accommodating last night, Mr. Clive?'

I had to laugh. 'How did you guess?' I asked, lighting a cigarette. 'You know everything, don't you? Well, I did see her last night. I saw her as she really is and not as I've been trying to imagine she is. It's a hell of a difference. She was tight and ... but never mind the details. My God, Russell, I've had a narrow escape. I'm through with her and I'm going to start work today. But first, I'm seeing Carol.' I looked at him. There was a sudden brightness in his eyes and I knew that he was pleased and relieved. 'Do you think she'll have anything to do with me?'

'I hope so, sir,' he said gravely. 'It will depend on how you approach her.'

'I know.' I experienced a sudden feeling of doubt. 'After the way I've treated her I can't expect it to be easy, but if she'll only listen to me, perhaps I'll make her understand.'

It was just after nine thirty when I walked into Carol's sitting room.

Carol came in after a few minutes. She was pale and there were dark smudges under her eyes.

'I'm glad you came, Clive,' she said and sat down with her hands in her lap.

'I had to come,' I said, not moving from the window, but turning to look at her, suddenly scared that I was going to lose her. 'I've been an awful fool, Carol. May I talk to you about it all?'

'I suppose so,' she said listlessly. 'Sit down, Clive, there's no need for you to be nervous with me.'

There was something in the flatness of her voice that worried me. I had a feeling that she might not care very much what I was going to say.

I sat down near her.

'I can't tell you how sorry I am for the rotten things I said to you. I was crazy. I didn't know what I was saying.'

She held up her hand. 'There's no need to go over that. You're in trouble, aren't you, Clive?'

'Trouble? Do you mean Gold? No, that's all right. I couldn't care less about Gold. I've thought it all out that's why I've come to see you.'

She looked at me sharply. 'I thought ...' she began, but stopped and looked down at her hands.

'You thought I was coming to ask you to plead my case with Gold, didn't you? Merle wanted me to, but I said no. It isn't that at all. I don't care what Gold does. I don't care if he buys my script or not. In fact, I don't think now I'll even write it. I'm through with all that. I've come to say I'm sorry for the beastly things I said and to tell you that I'm beginning work in a day or so.'

She sighed and fluffed up her hair with her slender fingers. 'I wish I could believe you, Clive. You've said that so many times in the past.'

'I deserve that. I've been pretty rotten about all this. I've been utterly rotten to you. I don't know what came over me, but I've chucked it for good. I'm sorry about this woman, Carol. It was just a physical madness. There was nothing else to it. Her way of life is something I could never understand nor could I share it with her. It's all over, Carol. Last night ...'

She stopped me. 'No, please Clive, I don't want to hear. I can imagine what happened.' She got up and walked over to the window. 'If you say it's over, then I'll believe you.'

I went to her and turning her, I pulled her to me in spite of her gesture of protest. 'Forgive me, Carol,' I pleaded. 'I've been worthless and rotten to you. I want you so much. You're the only one who means anything to me. Can't you forget this ever happened?'

She pushed me away gently. 'You're in a jam, my dear, and so am I. You see R. G. knows I am fond of you. He wants me to marry him. He thinks if you're out of the way, he stands a chance. He'll do everything in his power to get you out of the

way. I'm scared of him. He's so utterly ruthless and his power is so immense.'

I stared at her. 'You're scared because Gold's gunning for me? Then you do care for me? Be generous, Carol, say it if it's true.'

She suddenly smiled. 'I've been fond of you for a long time, Clive,' she said. 'If you're through with this woman, then . . .' she stopped, looked at me and went on. 'Well, I'm glad. I couldn't believe that a woman like that could hold you for long.'

I took her in my arms. 'I can't do without you, Carol.' I said. 'I'm so lonely and so unsure of myself. If you'll forgive me I don't care what happens.'

She slid her fingers through my hair. 'You silly old thing,' she said softly. 'I've always loved you.'

The feel of her slim young body in my arms was a new and exciting experience.

I pulled myself together and holding her away, I anxiously searched her face. 'I've been leading a rotten life, Carol, and it has made an awful mess of me, but if you really love me, I'll make good.'

'I love you.'

It was all going to be all right. I saw it in her face and I took her in my arms and kissed her.

'That settles it,' I said.

She looked up at me, her eyes bright. 'Settles what?'

'Our marriage.'

'But Clive . . .'

I kissed her again. 'You're going to walk out on the Studio and we're going to have a marvellous week all to ourselves. Then you'll go back and face the music, but you'll go back as Mrs. Clive Thurston and if Gold sacks you, he'll be sacking one of the best Hollywood script writers and some other producer will grab you.'

She shook her head. 'I couldn't do that,' she said, her eyes dancing. 'I've never let anyone down yet and I'm not going to start now. I'll tell him. I'll ask him for a week off and I'll tell him why.'

I did not realize until she had finished speaking that she had said yes.

'Carol!' I exclaimed, taking her in my arms.

I kissed her.

After a moment I said, 'But you're not seeing Gold until we're married. I'm not taking any chances of him pulling a fast one. We'll get married now. This very moment and then you can go to the Studio and tell him. I'll get everything ready. We'll take Russell. You and me, and Russell to look after us. Let's go to Three Point. It's still empty and I can work there. It won't be too far for you to reach the Studio and you'll love the drive and we'll be away from everybody.'

She shook me a little, smiling at my enthusiasm and excitement. 'Do be sensible, darling. We can't be married today. We haven't got a licence.'

'We're going to drive down to Tia Juana where you don't need a licence. All you need is five dollars and a girl as lovely as you. We'll get married and then next week, just to keep the record straight, we'll get married at the City Hall, then I'll feel doubly sure of you.'

She suddenly laughed. 'You're crazy, Clive, but I'm wild about you.' She clung to me for a few seconds. 'Ever since I first saw you, looking so nervous and sweet in Rowan's office, I've been wild about you. That was two years ago. You villain, Clive, to have kept me waiting such a long time!'

'I've been a blind fool,' I said, kissing her throat. 'But I'm going to make up for it now. Go and put on your hat. We're off to Tia Juana this very minute.'

My urgency and excitement was infectious and she almost ran from the room. As soon as she had gone, I picked up the telephone and called Russell.

'You've got a busy day before you, Russell,' I told him, not bothering to keep the excitement out of my voice. 'Pack enough stuff for both of us for one week. I want you to open Three Point again. You can fix that with the agent by telephone. The place can't be let yet. And then there's the apartment. Johnny Neumann would take it off our hands. He has always wanted it. From now on, Russell, we're going to make Three Point our

home and we're keeping away from the temptations of night life. I'm going to work. When you've done all that, take a taxi out to Three Point and put things in order for us when we arrive some time this afternoon. Can you do that?'

'Certainly, sir,' he replied, his voice a triumph of restrained delight. 'Your bags are already packed, sir. I foresaw what might happen and I knew you would be in a hurry. Everything will be in order for you and Mrs. Thurston when you arrive this afternoon.' He coughed a little pompously and added, 'I should like to be the first to congratulate you, Mr. Clive. I hope with all my heart that you will both be very happy,' and he hung up.

I stared at the telephone blankly. 'Well, I'll be damned,' I said aloud. 'I believe he planned it all along.'

I ran from the room, shouting to Carol to hurry.

I sat in the Chrysler outside the main office buildings of International Pictures. Extras, show girls, carpenters and technicians walked past me in a steady stream. Some glanced curiously at me, while others eyed the lines of the Chrysler with envious admiration. I drummed on the driving wheel and waited impatiently.

Everything was ready. Our bags were in the trunk of the Chrysler and we were on our way to Tia Juana, but Carol had insisted on seeing Gold before we were married.

'It's all right,' she said seriously. 'I'll make him understand. He's been good to me, Clive, and I don't want to do anything underhanded. For goodness' sake don't look so worried. R.G. can't stop us getting married. There's nothing he can do about it and all he will want me to do is to get back to the Studio as quickly as I can.'

I would not believe it. 'He'll run you out. When a guy has his power and his money and reaches his age, he just hates being thwarted. I'm sure he'll do something mean.'

But she laughed at me and had gone in to see him. She had been with him twenty minutes now and I was becoming anxious.

I suddenly had a sinking feeling of doubt. If Carol lost her job and I couldn't stage a come-back, what was to happen to us? The idea of returning to the almost forgotten routine of

going to work every morning, the cheap meals and wondering whether I could afford this thing or that appalled me.

I stubbed out my cigarette with an irritable shrug of my shoulders and told myself that such a thing could not happen. I was sure that I would write something worth while with Carol at my side. She would help me and I would help her. As a team we would be unbeatable.

'Still worrying?' Carol said, putting her hand on my arm.

I started because I had not heard her come down the few stone steps that led from the office buildings.

I looked at her anxiously. She was serious but calm, and she met my eyes with unruffled serenity.

'It's all right,' she said, smiling. 'Of course, it was a shock to him, but he was rather fine about it. I wish he wasn't so fond of me.' She drew a sharp little breath and shook her head. 'I hate hurting people, Clive.'

'What did he say?' I asked, opening the car door for her. 'Is he letting you off for a week?'

She nodded. 'Yes. The picture's held up anyway. Jerry Highams's ill. It's nothing much, but it'll mean a delay and – and, of course, Frank is still away.' She glanced back at the office building embarrassed when she mentioned Imgram's name. 'Clive—' she paused uneasily.

'What is it?'

'R.G. wants to see you.'

My heart gave an uneasy lurch. 'Wants to see me?' I repeated, staring at her. 'What on earth for?'

She got in the car and adjusted her dress over her knees. 'He wanted to know if you were out here and when I said you were, he asked if you would see him. He didn't say why.'

'He's going to back out of his contract,' I said, suddenly angry. 'That's how he's going to get even.'

'Oh no, Clive,' Carol said, quickly. 'R.G.'s not like that. I'm sure he—'

'Then why is he asking to see me? My God! You don't think he wants to lecture me on how I should treat you? I'm damned if I'd stand that from him.'

Carol looked worried. 'I think you should see him, Clive.

He's important and—' She stopped, hesitated and then went on, 'but it's up to you. If you don't want to – well, you must please yourself.'

I got out of the car and slammed the door. 'All right, I'll see him. I won't be a minute,' I said and ran up the steps into the office building.

I did not like this. It wasn't that I was scared of Gold, but when a man is as powerful and arrogant as he was, he would automatically dominate the situation.

I walked down the long corridor with my heart bumping uneasily against my ribs. I knocked on his office door and went in.

A tall, lovely looking girl with a Veronica Lake hair style, dressed in a well-cut black silk frock glanced up as I entered. She was sitting at a glass topped desk on which was scattered a mass of papers.

She gave me a quick, shrewd look and then smiled. 'Good morning, Mr. Thurston. Will you go right ahead? Mr. Gold is expecting you.'

I thanked her and crossed the office to another door and entered.

Gold's office was furnished like a sitting room. There was no desk. A large table at which some twenty people could comfortably sit occupied the far end of the room. Around the big, antique fireplace were armchairs and a large settee. Above the fireplace was an original Van Gogh which supplied the only bright colouring in the room.

Gold sat in an armchair facing the door. At his elbow was a small table on which were a few papers, a telephone and a large ebony cigar box.

He looked up as I came in and his massive head sank further into his shoulders.

'Sit down, Mr. Thurston,' he said, waving his hand to the armchair opposite me.

I was aware that my heart was beating rapidly and that my mouth was dry. This annoyed me and I tried to control my nerves without success. I sat down, crossed my legs and eyed him as calmly as I could.

He did not look at me for a moment, but drew on his cigar, blowing a thin stream of smoke to the ceiling. Then his sleepy, tawny coloured eyes met mine.

'I understand, Mr. Thurston,' he began, his low pitched voice was bland, 'that Carol and you are getting married this afternoon.'

I took out my cigarette case, selected a cigarette, tapped it once or twice on my thumb nail and lit it before replying. 'We are,' I said shortly and put my cigarette case back into my pocket.

'Is that wise?' he asked, raising his eyebrows.

A muscle in my calf began to quiver. 'That is something for us to decide, Mr. Gold,' I returned.

'I suppose it is,' he said, 'but I have known Carol for some time and I don't want to see her unhappy.'

'I appreciate how you feel,' I said, my anger struggling with my awe of the man. 'I assure you that Carol will be very happy.' I drew a deep breath and went on a little too hurriedly to be really effective. 'Much happier, Mr. Gold, than if she had married a man twice her age.'

He looked at me. 'I wonder,' he said, tapping ash into the tray near the cigar box. He brooded for a moment, then went on, 'I haven't a great deal of time, Mr. Thurston, so you will forgive me if I come to the point.'

'I haven't got any time to waste either, Mr. Gold,' I snapped back. 'Carol is waiting for me.'

He placed his finger tips together and eyed me with sleepy indifference. 'I am surprised that Carol could have fallen in love with anyone quite so worthless as you,' he said with disconcerting directness.

'Do we have to be personal?' I felt a sudden rush of blood to my face.

'Oh, I think so. You might ask me why I find you worthless. I'll tell you. You have no background. You have succeeded by an extraordinary chance – call it a fluke if you like – in getting a certain amount of notoriety, and in earning more than you ever thought possible. It is, to say the least, a lucky flash in the pan, more extraordinary, perhaps, because your first play was

excellent, although your novels are pure sensation. I have often wondered how you came to write that play. You see, Mr. Thurston, when I heard that Carol was fond of you I made it my business to find out something about you.'

'I don't think I'm going to listen to any more of this,' I said, between my teeth. 'My private life is my affair, Mr. Gold.'

'It would be if you were not attempting to share it with Carol,' he returned quietly. 'As you have been foolish enough to do that, you have no private life as far as I'm concerned.' He regarded his cigar for a moment and then looked over at me. 'You are not only a bad writer with no furture, Mr. Thurston, but you are also an exceedingly unpleasant character. I can't, of course, prevent you marrying Carol, but I can watch her interests and I will do so.'

I got to my feet. 'This has gone beyond a joke,' I exclaimed, my nervousness overcome by anger. 'You want Carol for yourself and you're being disagreeable because I've beaten you to it. All right, I can get along very well without you, Mr. Gold. I don't want your fifty thousand dollars. You and your Studio can go to hell as far as I'm concerned.'

He still regarded me with an absent minded, indifferent expression. 'Keep away from that Marlow woman, Mr. Thurston, or you and I will have another little talk.'

I stared at him, shocked. 'What the devil are you talking about?'

'Come, don't let us waste time. I know you have been making a fool of yourself with this woman. At first, I thought it was one of those unfortunate failings that men have who either have become bored with the usual run of women or else are suffering from some odd kink that the ordinary woman cannot satisfy. But I find you do not come under these categories. You have actually been stupid and weak enough to let this woman infatuate you. Surely there can be no better example of spineless degeneracy than that? When I heard of this, Mr. Thurston, I was not disappointed. I felt you were running to type.'

'Okay,' I said, furiously embarrassed to know that he had found out so much about me, 'you've had your say. I hope you've enjoyed it. Now I'm going and I'm marrying Carol.

Think of me tonight, Mr. Rex Gold, and say "that might have been me." '

'No doubt I shall,' Gold returned, his loose lips closing wetly over his cigar. 'I shall certainly think of you both. In fact, I'm not going to forget either of you. If Carol is unhappy because of you, you will be sorry. I promise you that, Mr. Thurston.'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LOOKING back now as I hammer out this story in a sordid little bedroom with pieces of wallpaper peeling from its damp walls and dust upon the table on which only a typewriter stands, I realize that the first four days of my marriage with Carol were the high lights in my life. In her I found a companion who gave me confidence and spiritual peace; who amused me and who seemed to satisfy me physically as well as mentally.

We would get up about ten o'clock and have breakfast on the verandah with the valley spread out below us like a magnificent natural carpet. Away to the right, we could see the still waters of Big Bear Lake reflecting the fir trees and the lazy white clouds that drifted like balls of whipped cream in the brilliant sky. After breakfast we would put on shirts and slacks and take the car to the lake where Carol would swim in a simple white swimsuit while I lounged in the boat, a rod in my hand, watching her. When the sun got hot I would go in after her and we would wrestle in the water, swim races and behave like a couple of kids on their first vacation. Then we'd go back for lunch which Russell would bring to us on the verandah and we'd talk and look at the view and talk some more. Then we'd go for a long walk in the woods, the pine needles making a carpet for us to walk on and the sunlight coming through the heavy foliage overhead making patterns on the ground. In the evening we would listen to the gramophone. It was grand to have Carol alone, lying on the big settee which we had dragged out onto the verandah, the moon shining down on us and the stars like diamond dust and the sound of music coming from the sitting room.

I told Carol much of my past life. I did not mention John Coulson nor did I speak of Eve, but I told her about the apartment house in Long Beach and how I had always wanted to write and my early struggles as a shipping clerk. I had to tell

her a few lies to make the story stand up, but as I had now completely accepted Coulson's play as my own I had no difficulty not only convincing Carol how I had written *Rain Check* but also myself.

In our big, airy bedroom with the windows wide open and the curtains pulled back and the moonlight making a bright patch of light on the white carpet, I would lie in bed with Carol in my arms. She slept with her head on my shoulder and one arm thrown across my chest. She always slept peacefully, scarecely moving until the sunlight woke her. Holding her in my arms, listening to her light breathing and thinking of the things we had done together during the day gave me many hours of satisfied contentment.

And yet, in spite of this contentment and happiness, I was aware that I was not entirely fulfilled. In some deep recess of my subconscious mind every now and then something stirred. I experienced from time to time a feeling of physical dissatisfaction. At first it was vague and undefined; then later this feeling became stronger and I knew that the physical impact that Eve had had upon my senses had left an indelible mark.

As long as Carol kept close by me, this hankering for Eve did not cause me any misgivings. Carol's personality and kindness and affection was strong enough to override Eve's remote influence, but if Carol went into the garden and left me alone, I found myself struggling against the temptation to call Eve on the telephone and to hear once again the sound of her voice.

You may find it difficult to understand why I could not completely dismiss Eve from my mind. I have already said that most men lead two lives – a normal life and a secret life. It followed then that most men have two mentalities. If the truth must be told, I began to realize that although Carol meant so much to me she was only able to satisfy part of my mental life. Eve's corrupting influence was necessary before I was completely fulfilled.

You must not think that I weakly accepted this situation without a struggle. During those four days and nights I did succeed in putting Eve out of my mind, but I knew that I was waging a losing battle. My sublime happiness with Carol was

o last. I suppose it was too much to expect considering that
s never able to withstand temptation for long. The change
e abruptly and without warning on the night of our fourth
together.

The night was perfect. A big, glittering moon hung above the
s, casting black sharp etched shadows and lighting the lake,
aking it look like a burnished mirror. It had been hot all day
d even on the verandah, it was still too hot to think of going
o bed.

Carol had suggested a midnight swim and we took the car to the lake. We stayed in the warm water for over an hour and by the time we returned to Three Point it was after one o'clock.

We were undressing in the bedroom when the telephone began to ring. We both paused and looked at each other in surprise. The bell sounded shrill and impatient in the silence of the night and I had a sudden feeling of suffocating excitement.

'Who can it be at this time?' Carol asked. I can see her now. She had just taken off her white and red sports frock and was sitting on the edge of the bed in her brassiere and shorts, looking lovely, her skin tanned a golden brown and her eyes bright.

'It's bound to be a wrong number,' I said, slipping into my dressing gown. 'No one knows we are here.'

She smiled at me and went on undressing while I hurrie[d] into the lounge and picked up the receiver.

'Hello?' I said. 'Who is it?'

'Hello, you stinker,' Eve said.

I gripped the telephone, aware of a sudden stifled feeling a[nd] a thickness in my throat. 'Why hello, Eve,' I said, keeping [my] voice low and looking over my shoulder across the lounge to [the] bedroom.

Carol had gone into the bathroom and I could hear wa[ter] running. There was no fear of her hearing me.

'You stinker,' Eve was saying in a flat expressionless vo[ice]. 'Why did you walk out on me like that?'

I scarcely understood what she was saying. Excitement [and] desire for her surged up in me and my blood pounded i[n my] ears.

'What?' I said, struggling to control my feelings. 'What are you saying?'

'When I woke and found you weren't there, it gave me an awful shock. I couldn't make out where you had got to.'

'So it gave you a shock, did it?' I said and laughed. 'Well, you've given me a shock or two in the past, so we're quits.'

There was a pause, then she said angrily, 'Oh, so we're quits? Well, let me tell you something, Clive. I've returned your rotten money. I don't want it. I think it was a stinking trick to say you were going to stay and then to sneak off like that.'

'You've returned the money?' I repeated blankly, not believing her. 'But, why?'

'I don't want it from you. I don't want your rotten money.'

'What did you want to do that for?' I asked, not knowing what I was saying.

'I've told you. I just don't want your rotten money. I can get on all right without it, thank you. I'm not going to be treated like that, so I've sent it back to you.'

'I don't believe you, Eve, I haven't had it. You're lying and you know it.'

'I tell you I sent it back.'

'Where did you send it to?'

'I put it in an envelope and sent it to the Writers' Club. That's your club, isn't it?'

I relaxed against the back of the chair, feeling a little sick. 'But why did you do it? I wanted you to have the money.'

'I tell you I don't want your money,' she snapped back. 'And Clive, I don't want to see you any more. So don't either telephone or call again. I'm telling Marty she's not to let you in and if you telephone she's to cut you off.'

The barriers that I had so half-heartedly tried to erect against her influence crumbled completely, and the beauty of the past four days was washed away in the flood of bitter repression that engulfed me when I heard those words.

'Don't be impulsive, Eve,' I said, gripping the telephone until my hand ached. 'I want to see you again.'

'You're not going to, Clive. You're making a fool of yourself.

I've warned you before, but it doesn't seem to make any difference. So we're not going to see each other again.'

'Don't let's be final about this, Eve,' I said, trying to keep the feverish desperation out of my voice. 'May I see you tomorrow? I'd like to talk this over with you.'

'No, Clive, I don't want to talk to you any more. I don't want you to call me. And if you do, I'll hang up. You've got to stop all this nonsense. You take me too much for granted. You take up too much of my time and I don't want it that way.'

'But look, Eve, I'm sorry I walked out on you. I can explain everything if only you'll let me. I didn't mean anything by it. It was just that I couldn't sleep and I was restless and I didn't want to disturb you. We've got to meet again. We can't break this up ... it's too important. Please, Eve, don't treat me like this ...'

'I'm tired and I'm not going to keep on talking. I don't ever want to see you again. It's good-bye.' There was a pause, then she repeated, 'Good-bye, Clive,' and she hung up.

'Eve ...' I began and then I sat very still staring at the telephone. I felt sick with frustration. It could not end like this. Good God, I thought, what kind of a rat must I be for a prostitute to return me my money and refuse to see me? I had never felt so completely and utterly humiliated. I replaced the receiver with a trembling hand. I had to see her again. She couldn't do this to me. My confidence in myself had gone and I was in black despair.

'Who was it, Clive?' Carol called from the bedroom.

'Just a fellow I know,' I called back, my voice husky and unsteady.

'What did you say?' She came to the door and ran across the lounge in her flimsy nightdress. 'Who was it?'

I walked over to the sideboard and mixed myself a drink. I did not dare let her see my face. 'Just a fellow I know. He was a little tight, I guess.'

'Oh.' There was a long pause. I did not look round but drank the whisky quickly.

'Drink?' I asked, looking for a cigarette.

'No, thank you.'

I lit the cigarette and turned. We looked at each other. Carol's eyes were full of questions.

'Come on,' I said, forcing a smile. 'Let's go to bed. I'm tired.'

'What did he want?' she asked suddenly.

I glanced over at her, frowning. 'What did who want?'

'Your friend . . . the one who phoned.'

'He was tight. God knows what he wanted. I told him to get to hell off the line.'

'Sorry.'

I looked at her sharply and then stubbed out the cigarette and went over to her. 'I'm sorry if I sounded like a crab. It annoyed me that a drunk should interrupt us like that.'

Again she looked searchingly at me, but I looked away and took off my dressing gown. I got into bed beside her and snapped off the light.

She came close, her head on my shoulder. I put my arm round her and we lay for a long time in the dark, not saying anything. In my mind, I kept saying to myself, you fool, you fool. You are throwing your happiness away. You are crazy. You have not been married five days and you're cheating already. This woman in your arms loves you. She will do anything for you. What do you think Eve will do for you? Nothing. You know she never will do anything for you.

'Is something wrong, Clive?' Carol asked.

'Of course not.'

'Sure?'

'Sure.'

'You're not worrying about anything? Tell me, Clive, if there's anything wrong. I want to share things with you.'

'Nothing, darling, really. I'm tired and that guy annoyed me . . . go to sleep. I'll be fine tomorrow.'

'All right.' She sounded doubtful and troubled. 'But you will tell me if anything ever goes wrong, won't you?'

'I will.'

'Promise?'

'Promise.'

She sighed and clung to me for a moment. 'I do love you, Clive. You won't let anything spoil this, will you?'

'Of course not,' I said, thinking what a swine I was. I was lying deliberately because I wanted to have them both. It wouldn't work out that way . . . it couldn't work out that way. 'Now stop talking rot and go to sleep. I love you; everything's perfect and there's nothing to worry about.'

She kissed me and then there was silence. Eventually I could tell by her breathing that she was asleep.

The next two days passed slowly. We continued to go to the lake. We swam, we talked, we listened to the gramophone and we read books. We both knew now that something was missing, something was not quite right, but neither of us said anything. I knew, of course, what it was. I don't think Carol guessed. I'm sure she did not, but she was troubled and I caught her looking at me from time to time with puzzled, hurt eyes.

Now that I had let the barriers down, Eve came into the house. As I sat reading, her face would suddenly appear on the page of my book. If I were listening to the gramophone, instead of the music, I would hear her voice saying, 'I don't want your rotten money,' over and over again. I would wake up at night thinking that I had her in my arms and then realizing, with a violently beating heart, that it was Carol and not Eve whom I was holding so tightly.

I began to long for her as a drug addict longs for a 'shot' in the arm. I began to count the hours when Carol would get in her car and drive away to the Studio and yet, I still loved Carol. It was as if two people were living in my body, one clamouring for the cold indifference of Eve and the other content with the love that Carol gave me. Over these two people I had no control.

It was Saturday afternoon and we were sitting in the boat. Carol had on a red swim-suit and it looked nice with her golden skin and dark hair.

'It would be wonderful if we could always be happy like this, Clive, wouldn't it?' she said.

I rowed a few strokes before I said, 'We'll always be happy, darling.'

'I don't know. Sometimes I'm afraid something will happen and spoil all this.'

'Nonsense,' I held the oars against my chest and stared across the big expanse of blue water. 'What could happen?'

She was silent for a moment, then she said, 'Don't let's get like other couples we know and cheat and lie to each other.'

'Don't worry,' I told her, wondering if she had guessed what was going on in my mind. 'We won't get like that.'

She was quiet for a minute or two, her fingers playing in the water. 'If you get tired of me, Clive, and you want someone else, will you tell me? I could stand it better if you told me than if I found you were cheating.'

'What's got into you?' I demanded, leaning towards her and staring at her. 'Why are you talking about such things?'

She looked up and smiled. 'I just want you to know. I think if you ever cheated on me, Clive, I'd walk out and never see you again.'

I tried to make a joke of it. 'Swell,' I said. 'Now I know how to get rid of you.'

She nodded. 'Yes, now you know how to get rid of me.'

When we returned to Three Point, there was a big, black Packard parked in the drive. I pulled up and stared at the car.

'Who can this be?' I asked.

Carol peered across me. 'Let's go up and see. What a bore having people call on our last day but one.'

I drove on up to the cabin. A short, dark fat man was sitting on the verandah with a highball on the table near him. He waved to Carol and got up.

'Who the hell's this?' I asked Carol in an undertone.

She clutched at my arm. 'Bernstien,' she whispered back. 'Sam Bernstien of International Pictures. I wonder what he can possibly want.'

We went up together and Bernstien patted Carol's arm affectionately before turning to me.

'So you're Thurston?' he said, offering a limp, fat hand. 'Well, I am glad and happy to know you, Mr. Thurston.

Glad and happy, and I don't often say that to writers, do I, my pet?'

Carol looked at him with a twinkle in her eyes. 'You don't, Sam,' she said. 'At least, you don't say it to me.'

'And you're honeymooning. Isn't that romantic? You're happy – both of you? That's swell, I can see it. My, my, it's done her good. You know, Thurston, I've watched this little girl ever since she came to Hollywood. She can write. Sure, she can write, but there was something frozen inside. "Carol, my pet," I said to her over and over again, "what you want is a man. A big, strong man and then you will really write." But she takes no notice.' He pulled at my sleeve and whispered, 'The trouble is she did not think me big enough,' and he laughed, patting Carol's shoulder and putting his arm around her. 'Now she will do great things.'

I thought this was all pretty nice, but I was wondering what he wanted. He hadn't come all the way from Hollywood just to tell me that he was glad and happy to see me and that Carol wanted a big, strong man.

'Let's sit down,' he said, going over to the table. 'Let's all have drinks. I have come to talk to your clever husband, Carol. I have a lot of important things to talk to him about, otherwise I would not interrupt your honeymoon. You know me, don't you, my pet? Romantic . . . a lover . . . I do not spoil a honeymoon unless it is important.'

'Come on, Sam,' Carol said, her eyes sparkling with excitement. 'What do you want to talk about?'

Bernstien rubbed his hand over his fat face, pushing his small beaky nose almost flat. 'I have read your play, Mr. Thurston,' he said. 'I think it is very good.'

A cold trickle ran down my spine. 'You mean "Rain Check"?' I said, staring at him. 'Why, why of course, it's very good.'

He beamed. 'And by golly, it'll make a grand picture. That's what I want to talk to you about. Let us, you and me make this play of yours into a picture.'

I looked quickly at Carol. She put her hand on mine and

squeezed it. 'I told you, Clive. I told you Sam would like it,' she said breathlessly.

I looked over at Bernstien. 'Do you mean it?'

He waved his hands. 'Mean it? Why should I come all this way if I didn't mean it? Of course, I mean it. But wait, there is one little thing. It's nothing, but it is something.'

'So there's a catch in it?' I said, my excitement dying on me. 'What is it?'

'You can tell me.' He leaned forward. 'What has Gold against you? Tell me that. Let me put that right and we make the picture. We give you a contract. Everything will be all right. But first I must put you right with Gold.'

'That's a hell of a chance.' I said bitterly. 'He hates my guts. He loves Carol. Now do you understand what he's got against me?'

Bernstien looked at me and then at Carol and began to laugh. 'That is very funny,' he said, when he had recovered sufficiently to speak. 'I had no idea. I would hate you too if I were in his place.' He drank half his highball and then raised a short, fat finger. 'There is a way. Not so good, but in the end—' he shrugged his shoulders, 'it'll be all right. You write the treatment and I will take it to Gold and tell him that I do the picture. He does what I say, but first I must have the treatment.'

'But first I want a contract.'

He frowned. 'No. Gold gives the contracts. I can't give you that. But I get you a contract when you have finished the treatment. I promise.' He offered his hand.

I looked at Carol.

'It's all right, Clive. Sam always gets his own way. If he promises to give you a contract, he'll give it to you.'

I shook hands with Bernstien. 'Okay,' I said. 'I'll do you a treatment and you'll sell it to Gold. Right?'

'Right,' he said. 'Now I go. I have already stolen too many minutes of your honeymoon. We will work together. Your play is very fine. I like your mind. I like the way you express yourself. I like your drama. It is good. You will make a fine treat-

ment. Come and see me at the Studio on Monday at ten o'clock. Carol will show you where to come. Then we get to work.'

When he had gone, Carol threw herself into my arms. 'Oh, I'm so pleased,' she said. 'Bernstien will make a marvellous picture for you. You two working together will make a marvellous team. Isn't it wonderful? Aren't you thrilled?'

I was scared and dismayed. I heard Bernstien's voice ringing in my ears. 'I like your mind. I like the way you express yourself. I like your drama. It is good. You will make a fine treatment.' He wasn't talking about me. He was talking about John Coulson. I knew I couldn't possibly write the treatment.

Carol pushed away from me and looked at me, her eyes troubled. 'What is it, darling?' she asked, shaking me a little. 'Why are you looking like that? Aren't you pleased?'

I turned away. 'Of course I am,' I said, sitting on the settee and lighting a cigarette. 'But, Carol, let's face it. I don't know much about film treatments. I'd much sooner sell the thing and let Bernstien get someone to do it. I – I don't think somehow—'

'Oh, nonsense,' she said, sitting by me and reaching for my hand. 'Of course you can do it. I'll help you. Let's do it now. Let's make a start this very minute.'

She was away to the library before I could stop her and I heard her calling to Russell to prepare a sandwich supper.

'Mr. Clive's going to turn his play into a picture, Russell,' I heard her say. 'Isn't it marvellous? We're going to start right in now.'

She was back again with a copy of the script and we sat down and began to go through it. In an hour or so Carol had mapped out the first rough treatment. I did nothing except agree because her mind was so quick and her experience so sure that I knew that any suggestion from me would be valueless.

While we paused to eat chicken sandwiches and drink iced hock, she said, 'You must do the script, Clive. It would mean so much if you did the actual shooting script. With your gift for dialogue . . . you must do it.'

'Oh no,' I protested, getting up and pacing the floor. 'I couldn't. I don't know how . . . no, that's absurd.'

'Listen . . .' she held up her hand. 'Of course you can. Listen to this dialogue . . .' and she began to read from the play.

I stopped walking up and down, held by the power and strength of the words. They were words that I could never write. Words that had beauty, rhythm and drama. And as I listened, the words seemed to burn themselves into my brain until I thought I must snatch the play from her or go mad.

What a fool I had been to imagine that I could step into Coulson's shoes. I thought of what Gold had said. 'It is, to say the least, a lucky flash in the pan, more extraordinary, perhaps, because your first play was excellent. I have often wondered how you came to write that play.'

This was too dangerous. If I made a slip now I might be found out. Already Gold was suspicious. Why else had he said such a thing? If I began to write the script they would know at once that I had never written the play. God knows what would happen to me if they found out.

'Aren't you listening, darling?' Carol asked, looking at me.

'Let's not do any more tonight,' I said, pouring hock into my glass. 'I think we've done quite enough. I'll talk it over with Bernstein on Monday. Maybe he has someone in mind to do the script.'

She looked at me puzzled. 'But darling . . .'

I took the play from her hands. 'No more tonight,' I said firmly and walked out onto the verandah, unable any longer to meet her eyes.

The moon rode high. I could see the lake, the valley and the hills. But at that moment they meant nothing to me. My attention was concentrated on a man who was sitting on the wooden seat at the far end of the garden. I could not see his features. He was too far away for that, but there was something strangely familiar about the way he sat and the way he held himself, his shoulders rounded and his clasped hands gripped between his knees.

Carol came out and joined me.

'Isn't it lovely?' she said, slipping her arm through mine.

'Do you see . . .?' I asked, pointing to the man sitting on the garden seat. 'Who is that man? What is he doing there

She looked. 'What do you mean, Clive? What man?'

A cold wave of blood surged down my spine. 'Isn't there a man sitting on the garden seat down there in the moonlight?'

She turned to me quickly. 'There is no one there, darling.'

I looked again. She was right. There was no one there.

'That's odd,' I said, suddenly shivering. 'It must have been a shadow . . . it looked like a man.'

'You're imagining things,' she said, her voice troubled. 'There honestly was no one there.'

I drew her closer to me. 'Let's go inside,' I said, turning back to the sitting room. 'It seems cold out here.'

It was a long time before I fell asleep that night.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SAM BERNSTIEN whipped off his horn-rimmed glasses and gave a wide, expansive smile. 'Yes,' he said, slapping the treatment Carol and I had written with his small fat hand, 'this is what I want. It is not right. It is not nearly right, but it is something to work on. It is a good beginning.'

I looked expectantly at him from where I was sitting in a low comfortable armchair in his big office. 'I thought that'd be something on which to base a discussion. After all, you have ideas of your own so I kept it to the briefest outline.'

Bernstien pulled a box of cigars towards him, selected one, offered it to me but I shook my head. He lit up and rubbed his hands. 'I didn't expect you'd be so quick,' he said. 'Now let us go through this point by point. When we have agreed, I suggest you take it away, expand it and let me have it when you are ready. Then I will see R.G.'

'You're going to have some difficulty there,' I said, pessimistically.

He laughed. 'That is something I can take care of,' he said. 'For the past five years R.G. and I have had our little fights. They mean nothing because, in the end, I get my own way. You leave him to me.'

'All right,' I returned, not convinced. 'I'll leave it to you, but I warn you, Gold hates my guts.'

He laughed again. 'I don't blame him,' he said. 'Carol's a very lovely girl and you are a very lucky man. But if he hates your guts, he also loves a good story.' He slapped the treatment again. 'This is a good story!'

I caught a little of his enthusiasm. 'Just as you say.' I pulled my chair closer to his desk. 'Suppose we go through the treatment.'

'It's swell,' he said, grinning delightedly at me. 'Take all this

y and give me a second treatment. I think then it wil be time to go on R.G.'

I got to my feet. 'Well, thanks a lot, Mr. Bernstien,' I said. 'I've enjoyed this immensely and I won't be long in letting you have the second treatment.'

'Just as soon as you can.' He walked with me to the door.

'I suppose Carol will be tied up all day?' I said, as we shook hands.

He lifted his shoulders. 'I do not know. Go along and see for yourself. She's with Jerry Highams. You know his office?'

'Sure,' I said. 'I know where it is. Well, so long, Mr. Bernstein. I'll be seeing you.'

I walked quickly down the corridor and although I had to pass Highams' office I did not pause. I had no intentions of neeting Frank Imgram again and the chances that he would b vith Carol were too great a risk.

I passed a public call-box at the end of the corridor and owed my steps, stopping outside it. I looked at my wrist-tch. It was eleven fifty-five. With any luck, Marty would not ve arrived. I wanted to be sure that Eve would answer the ephone. I entered the call-box and shut myself in. While I lled her number I was aware that my heart was pumping inst my side with suppressed excitement.

he bell rang several times before she answered.

Iello.'

recognized her voice.

ve,' I said. 'How are you?'

ood morning, Clive,' she said. 'How are you? You're early, you?'

d I wake you up?' I asked, startled that she sounded so y.

it's all right. I was having some coffee. I've been awake me.'

n am I going to see you?'

n do you want to come?'

wait a minute, Eve,' I said too puzzled to be 'The other day you said you didn't want to see me

'All right, then I don't want to see you again,' she returned and giggled.

'I'm coming right away,' I said. 'You are a devil. You gave me a bad two days. I really thought you meant it.'

She giggled again. 'Well, you are the limit, Clive. Anyway I did mean it at the time. I was angry. You were a stinker to go off like that.'

'All right, I was a stinker,' I said, laughing. 'But I've had my lesson and I won't do it again.'

'You better not,' she warned. 'I shan't forgive you so easily next time.'

'Come and have lunch with me.'

'No.' Her voice hardened. 'I'm not going to do that, Clive. You can come and see me professionally if you want to, but I'm not coming to lunch.'

'That's what you think. You are coming to lunch and you're not going to argue,' I said.

'Clive!' There was a startled annoyed note in her voice. 'I tell you I'm not coming to lunch.'

'We'll talk about that when we meet. I'll be along in half an hour.'

'It's too soon, Clive. I shan't be ready by then. Come about one o'clock.'

'All right and wear something nice.'

'I'm not coming to lunch.'

'You're going to do what you're told for a change,' I said, laughing at her. 'You put on something smart—' but the line suddenly went dead as she hung up.

I looked at the telephone and grinned. Okay, sweetheart, I thought, we'll see who's going to be boss.

I went to the parking lot and drove the Chrysler slowly through the Studio gateway. I felt good. I felt confident that I could master Eve. She could hang up on me if that pleased her vanity, but she was going to have lunch with me, if I had to drag her to the restaurant in her nightdress.

I drove to the Writers' Club and asked the Steward for my mail. He gave me a few letters and I walked over to the bar and ordered a Scotch and soda. A quick look at the letters convinced

me that there was nothing from Eve. Leaving my drink on the bar table I went back to the Steward and asked him if he was sure that there was nothing else for me.

'No, sir,' he said, after looking again in my pigeonhole.

And yet Eve had been so emphatic that she had returned the forty dollars I had given her on that night I had walked out on her.

I went to the telephone and dialled her number.

'Hello,' she said, almost immediately.

'I hope I didn't get you out of your bath, Eve,' I said. 'But you remember you told me you had returned my money?'

'Well, I did.' Her voice was sharp.

'To the Writers' Club?'

'Yes.'

'Well, it isn't here.'

'I can't help that,' she returned indifferently. 'I sent it and when I say a thing I mean it.'

'But Eve, I want you to have the money. I came here to get it. Are you quite sure you sent it?'

'Of course I am and, anyway, I don't want it. You annoyed me, so I returned you the money. I shan't accept it if you do give it to me.'

I stared thoughtfully at the pencil scribblings on the wall. There's something wrong here, I decided.

'Did you put a note inside?'

'Why should I?' She was on the offensive now. 'I put the money in an envelope and addressed it to the Club.'

She was lying. I knew now that she never had any intentions of sending the money back. She had wanted to show her power. She knew that she would hurt me by sending the money back to me, but, in spite of wanting to get even with me, her greed had been too strong. She had tried to compromise and hoped that by telling me she had returned the money I would believe her and she would get her revenge cheaply. Well, she had made me suffer for two days, but now I realized that she had not been big enough to go through with it, my contempt for her was in itself a victory.

'Maybe it's been lost in the mail,' I said, half jeering at her. 'Well, never mind, I'll make it up to you.'

'I don't want it, Clive,' she snapped. 'I must go now. My bath's running.'

'We'll talk about it when we have lunch,' I said and tried to get the receiver down before she did, but she beat me to it.

I reached Laurel Canyon Drive at five minutes to one. I pulled up outside the little house and sounded my horn. Then I got out and walked down the path. I rapped on the door, took out a cigarette and lit it.

I waited a moment or two and then realized that there was no sound coming from the house. Usually as soon as I knocked I would hear Marty coming down the passage.

I frowned, then I knocked again. Nothing happened. I waited, a cold sinking feeling coming over me as I stood there.

I knocked four times and then I went back to the Chrysler. I got in and drove slowly down the street. When I got out of sight of the house, I pulled up and lit another cigarette. My hands were trembling as I held the match.

I suddenly thought of Harvey Barrow. I remembered what he had said. 'I said I'd take her away and she said all right. But I went to her place four times and each time her damn maid said she was out. But, I knew she was upstairs laughing at me.'

My hands tightened on the steering wheel. She hadn't even had the decency to send Marty with some lie. I could see her in the little bedroom, her head on one side, listening to me knocking on the door. Marty would be with her and they would exchange glances. They would smile. Let him knock, Eve would whisper, he'll soon get sick of it.

I drove slowly along Sunset Boulevard, not thinking of anything, but feeling numb and sick. I pulled up outside a drugstore, went in and dialled her number. The bell rang for a long time, but there was no answer.

I could imagine her about to pick up the receiver and then stop. She would know who it was. I leaned against the wall of the stale smelling call-box, listening to the bell ringing. Quite

suddenly I wanted to kill her. It was a cold, almost imperso thought that dropped unexpectedly into my mind and I fou myself considering it with interest and pleasure. The horrified at even contemplating such a thing, I hung up an walked out into the sunlight.

Was I going crazy? I asked myself, as I drove toward Three Point. It was one thing to be furiously angry with her, bu to kill her . . . what a mad, stupid, dangerous thing even to think of for a moment.

All the same I knew I would get pleasure out of killing Eve. There was no other way that I could touch her. Her armour was too strong. Again I hurriedly dismissed the thought but it kept coming back, and, in my mind, I went throughout the details of killing her and it gave me a lot of pleasure.

I saw myself, some night, getting into that little house when she was out and waiting for her. I would hide upstairs in one of the empty rooms until I heard her key in the lock. Then I would come out of my hiding place onto the landing to make sure that she was alone. I knew I could see her quite easily by leaning over the banisters and that she couldn't see ne.

Before going to bed, she would want to use the bathroom. I ould slip back into one of the other empty rooms and wait ntil she went downstairs again. It would give me a lot of easure to think she was moving about the lonely little house, lieving that she was alone, while, all the time, I was hiding stairs, waiting to kill her.

Perhaps she would return drunk as she had on the night I had ked out on her. If she were drunk, then it would be easy for to kill her. I would have no pity nor feeling for her if I d her snoring and smelling of whisky.

would creep out onto the landing and listen. I would hear repare for bed. I knew enough of her routine now to pic- exactly what she would do. First she would take off her She did that the moment she got indoors because it was tight that she could not sit down comfortably in it. Then ould go to her wardrobe and take out a clothes hanger. ould put the coat and skirt away methodically. Perhaps

she would light a cigarette while she slid out of the rest of her flimsy underclothes. She would put on her nightdress and flop into bed.

By listening carefully, I would be able to follow all these details. Each of them had their own individual sound to the final creaking of the bed as it received her slight body. Perhaps she would read or perhaps she would turn out the light and smoke in the darkness. Whatever she did, I would give her plenty of time to fall asleep. What did I care if I had to wait hours up there in the darkness? I would come down eventually. I would come down like a ghost, holding onto the banister rail and trying each stair before I put my full weight upon it. I would not wake her until it was too late for her to save herself.

I would edge round the door and peer into the darkness. I would not be able to see her, but I would know just where her head lay and I would sit gently on the bed by her side. Even then she would not awaken. I would find her throat with one hand and with the other I would switch on the little bedside lamp.

Then would come the moment that would heal all the wounds she had inflicted on me. That brief moment when her senses would awake from sleep and her eyes would recognize me. We would look at each other and she would know why I was there and what I was going to do. I would see the helpless, terrified look that would come into her eyes and I would see her for the first time without her wooden mask or without her professional mannerisms.

It would be only for two or three seconds. But it would be enough. I would kill her quickly with my knee on her chest and my hands about her throat. Pinning her to the bed with all my weight, she would not have a chance. She would have no time to steel her body against me or even scratch at my hands.

No one would know who had done it. It could have been any of her men friends.

I was shaken out of this horrible daydream by the violent sound of a motor horn and I only managed to avoid a head-on collision with a Cadillac. I had been so absorbed that I had

allowed the Chrysler to wander over to the left side of the r
I heard the driver of the other car curse me as he swept past
I hastily pulled over to my right side and continued on my
with caution.

When I reached Three Point I was still disturbed by
uncontrolled feeling of pleasure I had experienced while i
agining how I might settle all my differences with Eve. As
was now almost three o'clock, I asked Russell to bring me sand
wiches and a whisky on the terrace.

While I waited, I paced up and down, savagely angry by th
way Eve had treated me and yet alarmed to realize to what ar
extent my mentality had been affected by her callous
indifference towards me. The fact that I had actually con-
templated murder down to the last details and had derived
pleasure in doing so shocked and frightened me. Such a thought
would never have entered my mind some three weeks ago, but
in that unguarded moment in the call-box it had seemed to be
the one solution of our struggle.

I must pull myself together, I thought, as I paced up and
down. She's no good to me. She never will be and I might just
as well admit defeat and forget her. I can never hope to get on
with any work if I allow her to influence my mind, to occupy
my thoughts and to irritate my nerves in this way. This non-
ense must stop.

Russell came with a tray which he put on the table.

'Get my typewriter, Russell,' I said turning. 'I've some work
do.'

He beamed at me. 'I do hope, sir, you had a good morning at
Studio.'

It was all right,' I said, without enthusiasm. 'Be a pal and le
get to work.'

e gave me a quick, disappointed glance and hurried into
ibrary for my typewriter.

at down and began to read through Bernstien's notes but I
concentration difficult. I could not erase from my mind
miliation of standing outside Eve's door like some street
an. The more I thought about it, the more angry I
e. When Russell put the typewriter at my elbow and had

gone away, I could not bring myself to work. Instead I finished the sandwiches and began to drink steadily.

I'll make her pay for this, I thought, pouring more whisky into my glass with an unsteady hand. Somehow I'll find a way to get even with her. I drank the whisky at a gulp and immediately refilled my glass. I did this several times until I felt a slight numbness in my legs. I knew I was getting drunk. I pushed the decanter away and pulled the typewriter towards me. To hell with her, I said aloud. She can't stop me. Nobody can.

I made an attempt to write the first scene along the lines suggested by Bernstein and after struggling with it for over an hour I tore the sheet from my typewriter and ripped it angrily to pieces.

I was in no mood for creative thought and, leaving the terrace, I wandered through the empty rooms of the cabin. Russell had taken himself off somewhere. He had probably hidden himself away for an afternoon nap in the woods. The cabin was unbearably lonely and I began to wonder if I had not been a fool to have settled in such an out of the way place.

It was perfect so long as I had Carol to keep me company, but now that she was going to spend most of her days at the Studio I was going to find it pretty dull.

My mind kept returning to Eve. I made a feeble effort to think of something else, but I did not succeed. I picked up a novel and tried to read, but after turning a half a dozen pages I realized that I had no idea what I had been reading and I threw the book across the room.

By now, the whisky I had drunk was hitting me and I felt heavy in the head and reckless. I suddenly got to my feet and went over to the telephone. I'll tell her exactly what I think of her, I decided. If she thinks she can do that to me and get away with it she's got a surprise coming to her.

I dialled her number.

'Who is that please?' Marty asked.

I hesitated, then quietly replaced the receiver. I wasn't going to be snubbed by Eve through Marty. I lit a cigarette and wandered unsteadily onto the terrace again.

I could not go on like this, I thought. I must try to do s
work. I again sat down at the table and began reading thro
Bernstien's notes, but my mind kept wandering and I fina
gave it up in sespair.

Carol returned in time for dinner. She got out of her crea
and blue roadster and came running across the lawn towar
me.

I felt a great weight roll from my mind at the sight of her
and I held her tightly against me for several seconds before
letting her go.

'Well, my dear,' I said, smiling at her. 'How did you get
on?'

She heaved a sigh. 'I'm tired, Clive. We've been at it without
a stop. Do come in and get me a drink. I want to hear all your
news.'

We walked to the cabin while I listened to her account of the
story conference.

'R.G. is delighted so far,' she said. 'It's going to be a mar-
vellous picture. Jerry has never been better and even R.G. has
made one good suggestion.'

I fixed her a gin and lime and gave myself another whisky.

'I say, Clive,' she exclaimed suddenly. 'You haven't drunk all
…at whisky yourself, have you? The decanter was full this
…orning.'

I gave her a drink and laughed. 'Of course not,' I said. 'Wha
… you think I am … a soak? I upset the damn thing an…
…ted half of it.'

…he gave me a quick, searching look but I met her eyes and
…ace cleared. 'So you're not a soak,' she said, smiling at me.
…looked tired and pale. 'Well, tell me, did Sam like the
…nent?'

…odded. 'Sure he liked it. Why not? You wrote it, didn't

… wrote it, darling,' she said, again looking troubled.
…not sore about it, are you? I mean – I won't interfere if
…'t—'

…t it,' I said shortly. 'I know I'm not so hot when it
… a picture treatment, but I don't mind learning.' I…

down by her side and took her hand. 'But I'm not going so well with the second rewrite. You know, Carol, I wish Bernstien would get someone else to do it. I don't seem to be getting anywhere.'

'Give me a cigarette and tell me what Bernstien said.'

After I had lit her cigarette I explained Bernstien's suggestions. She listened attentively, nodding her small dark head every now and then with approval.

'He's terrific,' she said, when I had finished. 'It is enormously improved. Oh, Clive, you simply must work at it. I know you can do it and it'll mean so much to you.'

'It's all very well for you to talk, Carol,' I returned bitterly, 'but now I haven't any feeling for the story. I've been messing with it all the afternoon and I've got nowhere.'

She looked at me for a moment, her eyes searching and puzzled. 'Perhaps tomorrow you'll feel more like it,' she said hopefully. 'Sam will expect something soon. He's late for production as it is.'

I got up irritably. 'Oh, I don't know. You can't force these things.'

She came and put her arms round me. 'Don't worry, Clive. It'll come, you see.'

'Oh, the hell with it.' I turned to the door. 'I'll put on a dressing gown and settle down for the evening. Have you a book?'

'I've some work to do,' she said quickly. 'I want to draft out a few scenes.'

'You can't go on working all day and night,' I returned, irritated that she could give her mind to creative thought. 'Have a rest. It'll do you good.'

She pushed me to the door. 'Don't tempt me. You sit on the terrace. It's lovely out there and I'll come as soon as I'm through.'

I sat on the darkening terrace for a long time brooding about Coulson. I knew I was doing a mean thing by turning his play into a picture, but I had gone too far to stop. I should never have stolen his play in the first place. But if I had not done that I should not be where I was, sitting on the terrace of an ex-

pensive cabin in one of the loveliest spots in California. I shou never have met Carol. I drew a sharp breath – and I shoul never have met Eve.

'What are you doing out there in the dark?' Carol said as she stepped onto the terrace. 'You've been sitting there hours, my dear. It's after twelve o'clock.'

I pulled myself together with a start. 'I've been thinking,' I said, getting up. I felt stiff and a little cold. 'I had no idea the time had gone so quickly. Have you finished?'

She slipped her arm round my neck and kissed me. 'Don't be cross, darling,' she whispered, her lips touching my ear. 'I've roughed out the second treatment for you. You can do it now and it's really good. You're not angry, are you?'

I stared down at her, sick with envy that she could do so easily what I had failed to do. 'But, Carol, you can't do my work as well as your own. This is absurd. I'll be living on yo next.'

'Don't be angry,' she pleaded. 'All I've done is to put your leas and Sam's ideas down on paper. Why a stenographer uld do that. You must polish it tomorrow and take it to Sam. hen R.G. will okay it and you can really start work. Give me a s and take that frown off your face.'

I kissed her.

She gave me a quick hug. 'Come on to bed,' she said. 'I must ıp early tomorrow.'

'm coming,' I said, feeling flat and depressed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DURING the next four days I became increasingly aware that I made a bad mistake in coming to live at Three Point. By doing this I had cut myself off from all social contact and now, without any form of amusement, I was rapidly becoming bored with this self-imposed isolation. Although I had hoped to write a novel in the quiet of these surroundings when the time came to begin I found that inspiration was lacking.

I had managed, with a considerable effort, to rewrite Carol's second treatment of the play. As she had done most of the necessary work, my own particular job amounted merely to copying what she had written. Although I had no actual creative work to do, it still required an effort of will to sit at my typewriter. Several times while I worked, I was tempted to telephone for a stenographer to come out and finish it. But, in the end, I managed to complete the treatment and it was now in Sam Bernstien's hands. I was waiting with mixed feelings to hear what Gold was going to say. It was my intention, if he accepted it, to insist that someone – anyone but me – should do the shooting script. I knew that I was incapable of doing it and besides, I dare not take the risk of writing the additional dialogue and script required. I had no hope of imitating John Coulson's brilliant phrases and, if I did make the attempt, it would at once become obvious to a man of Gold's shrewdness that I was not the author of the original play.

My financial position was beginning to worry me. My capital was dwindling, my royalties were becoming depressingly smaller each week and my debts were increasing. I gave Carol no hint of the true position since I knew that she would insist on paying her share. She was, of course, earning big money at the Studio and, although she used a certain amount of this for pocket money and for her wardrobe, the bulk was being carefully invested in real estate. Whatever else were

my faults, I was determined never to take a dollar from he

While she was at the Studio, the day seemed interminable. spent many hours shut up in my library and when I could n longer bear this seclusion I went into the woods and roamed about in a mood of black depression. Eve and John Coulson were never far from my thoughts.

I did attempt to write a shooting script of *Rain Check* but no sooner had I begun than I experienced an eerie feeling that John Coulson was in the room by my side, watching me struggle with his creation and silently laughing at my clumsy efforts. It was an absurd fancy but it persisted and made concentration impossible.

For three days I fought against a strong desire to telephone Eve, but on the fourth day, soon after Carol had gone to the Studio, I gave way to temptation.

As it happened I had allowed Russell a few days off as a relative of his was dangerously ill. I had finished my coffee which I had prepared for Carol and myself and I could still hear the distant sound of Carol's car as she drove down the mountain road. Suddenly, acting on impulse, I threw down the newspaper I was reading and reached for the telephone.

Eve answered almost at once.

'Hello?'

It was extraordinary that, even after the way she had treate the sound of her voice quickened my blood and caused m rt to beat rapidly.

Eve,' I said. 'How are you?'

Hello, stranger,' she returned gaily. 'Where have you been is time?'

ould hardly believe that this was Eve speaking. Her voice right and I sensed that something had happened to make ppy. In some odd perverse way, this annoyed me.

u're not confusing me with someone else, are you?' I arcastically. 'This is Clive. The guy you don't see when ks on your door.'

iggled. 'I know.'

e thought it was amusing, did she? I clenched the re- ntil my knuckles turned white. 'I think it was a pretty

rotten trick to play on me. I arranged lunch. At least you might have seen me and made an excuse.'

'It was a pretty rotten trick to sneak off in the middle of the night too,' she returned. 'And I didn't want to have lunch with you. I won't be told what to do by any man. I hope it's taught you a lesson.'

I gritted my teeth. 'You're always trying to teach me a lesson.'

She giggled again. 'And you don't seem to learn, do you, Clive?'

'At least, I'm a tryer.'

'You are. I've never known anyone so difficult to get rid of.'

'So you want to get rid of me?'

'Have you only just found that out?'

Her flippancy infuriated me. 'You'll succeed one of these days and then you'll be sorry,' I said angrily.

'That's what you think,' she returned, laughing.

This was Eve in an entirely new mood and my curiosity got the better of my temper. 'You sound pretty good this morning. Have you come into a fortune?'

'No.'

I waited but she offered no further explanation.

'I think I'll come and see you, Eve,' I said.

'I can't see you today.'

'Now don't be like that, Eve. I want to see you.'

'I shan't be in, so don't come. You won't find me if you do.'

'Where are you going?'

'That's my business.'

I felt blood mounting to my face. 'Well, when shall I see you?'

'I don't know. If you want to come you'd better ring me in a few days.'

I had an idea. 'Is Jack coming home?'

'He is. Now are you satisfied?'

The old feeling of jealousy came to me again. 'I'm glad,' I lied. 'I suppose you're going back to your other house, is that it?'

right. R.G. agrees. What do you know? A contract for one hundred thousand dollars. I congratulate you.'

I stared at him speechless.

'I thought that would surprise you,' he said grinning. 'Didn't I tell you I would get round Gold? I know him. I know all his little ways.' He opened a drawer and took out a contract form. 'Everything has been agreed to. I have had my way in everything. See for yourself.'

With unsteady hands I picked up the contract and began to read. Then quite suddenly my heart gave a lurch and I went cold.

'But it says here I'm to do the shooting script,' I stammered.

'Of course,' Bernstien beamed. 'Carol suggested the idea herself and when I mentioned it to R.G. he made that the condition of the contract. He said that the picture would be no use unless it had your brilliant dialogue. Those were his very words.'

I sat down limply. Gold knew then. No wonder he was offering a hundred thousand dollars. He knew that I would not dare attempt to produce any dialogue.

'But aren't you pleased?' Bernstien demanded, staring at me with puzzled eyes. 'Is anything wrong? Don't you feel well?'

'I'm all right,' I said dully. 'This – this has been a bit of a shock to me.'

Bernstien brightened at once. 'Of course. You did not expect so much. But it's a grand play and it will make a fine picture. Have a drink?'

I was glad to gulp down the stiff whisky he gave me. All the time he was fussing around mixing the drink, I was trying to think of a way out. There was no way out. Gold had got me where he wanted me.

The next couple of hours meant nothing to me. I drove around aimlessly, my mind stunned by the trick Gold had devised, wondering how I was going to explain to Carol that I could not go through with it.

I had to make money some way. I just could not go on without money. Then I remembered *Lucky Strike.*

When I first came to Hollywood I had been a keen gambler and I used to go out to the gambling ships which were anchored off the California beaches. There were more than a dozen of these ships which avoided the regulations by staying outside the three mile limit and I had been out to the *Lucky Strike* a number of times. It was about the best equipped gambling ship of the lot and I had at one time or another won considerable sums of money. I would try my luck again.

Whether it was because I had faith in my luck or because I had something to do I brightened up and I drove to the Writers' Club and cashed a cheque for a thousand dollars.

I had a few drinks and some sandwiches and spent the rest of the afternoon looking through the illustrated papers and brooding about Gold.

I had a light supper at the club and it was just after nine o'clock when I drove down to Santa Monica bay. I turned into the parking lot on the pier and for several minutes I sat in the Chrysler looking across the bay.

I could see the *Lucky Strike* anchored outside the three mile limit. It was a mass of lights and already taxi-boats were going out to the ship.

It was a good ten minutes' ride out to the *Lucky Strike.* The taxi-boat rolled and pitched a little, but it did not bother me. There were only five other passengers with me. Four of them were well dressed, rich looking, middle-aged businessmen and the other was a girl. She was tall and a red head. Her skin was creamy and soft looking. Her body in her tight yellow dress was soft looking too. She was voluptuous and sensual and she had a high-pitched, slightly hysterical laugh.

I sat opposite her. She had good legs although they thickened abruptly above her knees. She was with a grey haired man with a hooked nose. He seemed kind of embarrassed when she laughed. I looked at her and she looked at me. I could see she knew what I was thinking because she suddenly stopped laughing and began pulling her skirt over her knees. It was too short and tight, so she kept her hands on her knees and did not look at me any more.

The *Lucky Strike* was about two hundred and fifty feet long.

It looked big from the little taxi-boat and there was trouble with the red head before she got aboard. I guess she was kind of self conscious climbing up the wind swept ladder. Anyway she made a lot of fuss and the man with the hooked nose got mad at her.

There was a big crowd on board and I lost sight of her. I was sorry. She was like a candle burning in a dark room.

I mixed with the crowd, but I did not see anyone I knew. I wanted a drink badly so I headed for the bar. It was packed with people, but I managed to catch the bartender's eye. I got part of a double whisky which was handed to me over the heads of the crowd. It was no good trying to get another, so I went into the main cabin where the dice tables were.

I edged through the crowd until I reached the centre table. I had to use my elbows, but the crowd seemed good tempered and let me through. Green dice rolled across the green cloth, struck the rim together and bounced back. One stopped short showing five white spots. The other tumbled out to the centre of the table and came to rest with six spots on top.

A sigh went up as the winner cleared the table of money.

I watched the play for about five minutes and then the dice came to me.

I put down two twenties and threw snake-eyes. I put down another twenty and threw a five. After four throws I made it and let it ride. Then I threw an eleven and began to coast.

I made five straight passes, then I lost the dice. I began to bet on the board.

I found the red head was standing at my side. She was wedging her hip against mine. I leaned against her, but I did not look at her. The dice came around to me again. I put down two fifties and made it. I made two more passes. Then I crapped out.

'You're losing a lot of weight,' the red head said.

I wiped my forehead with a handkerchief and looked around for the man with the hooked nose. He was wedged against the table opposite us. He could not hear what she was saying.

'Do you like that guy?' I asked. I was betting ten dollars at a time and I had just won again.

She crowded me. 'Would it make any difference?'

I got the dice again and upped the ante. 'It might,' I said and made three straight passes.

'I'm bringing you luck,' she said. 'It's my red head.'

My next throw was seven. I waited until they paid me and then passed the dice.

'Let's go somewhere,' I said, my pockets tight with money. 'Have you been here before?'

The man with the hooked nose had the dice now. He threw two sixes. They took his money.

'I know all the places,' she said and squeezed herself out of the crowd. I noticed a lot of men enjoyed that. I did not blame them.

I took a quick look at the man with the hooked nose, but he was busy. So I forced myself through the crowd and joined her.

She led me along the deck, through the crowds, up an iron ladder. I could not see her, but I could smell her perfume. I followed her with my nose.

The crowds suddenly disappeared and we were alone. I felt the rail against my back and she was pressing against me.

'The moment I saw you . . .' she said.

'That's the way it is,' I said and took hold of her. She was big and soft. My fingers sank into her back.

'Just kiss me,' she said and she put her hands under my coat.

We stayed like that for a minute.

Then she jerked away. 'Whew! Come up for air,' she said.

I hated her suddenly more than anyone ever hated anyone.

I took hold of her again, but she shoved me off. She was terribly strong. I did not think she could be so strong.

'Don't rush me,' she said, giggling. 'Just take it easy.'

I wanted to slam my fist in her face, but I stood away and said nothing.

I could see her fiddling with her hair. She turned round and looked at the moon that was coming up fast.

'I'd better get back,' she said.

'That's all right with me.'

She made no move. 'He'll be wondering where I am.'

'I guess he will.'

It was a pushover.

She put her hands on her lips. 'I believe you bruised me.'

I did not care a great deal. 'Not you,' I said.

She laughed. 'The moon looks all right now,' she said, turning back to me.

'Were you waiting for the moon?'

'Hm-hm.' Her hands reached out and I pulled her against me.

'I don't neck with every guy I meet,' she said as if excusing herself.

'I should worry what you do so long as you do it now,' I said, still hating her, but overwhelmed by her.

She bit my mouth.

Someone laughed on the deck below. I knew that laugh. No one but Eve could laugh like that. I shoved the red head away.

'What's the matter?' Her voice was a mumble.

I stood listening.

Eve laughed again. I looked over the rail but the crowd was too dense. I could not see her.

'Hey!' The red head sounded angry.

'To hell with you,' I said.

She swung at me, but I caught her wrist. It felt soft and flabby in my grip. She gave a kind of squeal.

I called her a name and left her.

Down on the deck I looked around for Eve. I saw her at last standing by the lighted doorway that led to the roulette room. By her side was a tall hard-faced man in a well fitting tuxedo.

I knew who he was.

As I moved towards them, they went into the roulette room. He had his hand on her elbow and she was looking happy.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I DID not want Eve to see me. Anyway, not just yet. I was not able to stand in the doorway because people kept crowding in. The room, although large, was pretty tightly packed. From the door, I could not see the tables, although I could see the shaded arc lights that illuminated them.

I moved cautiously forward until I reached the first table. I was wedged then, and looking around, I saw Eve was not there. I guessed she would be at the far table and I tried to make my way there. The crowd was too thick and I had to wait.

The croupier was singing out, '*Faites vos jeux Messieurs.*'

There was a concerted movement towards the table and I was carried along with it.

A moment later the croupier said, '*Les jeux sont faits.*' The pressure eased and I was able to back away from the table and drift down the room. Even then it was not easy. I picked up some black looks as I squeezed through the crowd, using my elbows and trying to be pleasant about it.

It was a full ten minutes before I reached the other table. Eve was standing behind Jack Hurst who had managed to get a seat.

The croupier was saying, '*Onze, noir, impair.*'

After he had raked in the losing stakes, he pushed a small pile of chips across to Hurst.

'*Messieurs, faites vos jeux.*'

Eve leaned forward and whispered in Hurst's ear. Her eyes were bright and she looked almost beautiful. He shook his head impatiently, but did not look around. He staked on black and *Impair.*

While other players were staking, I eyed him with interest. He was big, broad shouldered and powerful looking. His eyes were deep set and his nose straight. He had no top lip. His mouth looked like a hard line drawn with a ruler and pencil.

His tuxedo fitted him well and his linen was flawless. I guessed he would be about forty.

So this was the guy Eve had fallen for. I did not blame her. Whatever else he was, he was a man. I found it hard to admit, but Jack Hurst looked all right.

I glanced at Eve. She had her hand possessively on his shoulder and she never took her eyes off him for one second. Every move he made she watched excitedly. I hardly recognized her. She was animated and I had never seen her look so happy.

All the same, I was sick with jealousy. If Hurst had been a little rat of a man, it would not have been so bad. But he wasn't. I could not help comparing him with myself. The comparison wasn't so good. He was better looking, more interesting and more powerful. He looked like a man who would get his own way in everything he did.

The wheel spun and Eve leaned forward. Hurst just sat with his eyes on the wheel, cold and disinterested.

The croupier said, '*Rien ne va plus.*'

The ball gradually slipped down the ledge and finally lodged in one of the compartments of the bowl.

The croupier paid out. He shoved more chips at Hurst and smiled at him. Hurst didn't catch his eye.

I began a slow move around the table. It was difficult and Hurst won more chips before I got behind Eve. I had to elbow a fat old woman out of the way before I got right behind her. I could smell the perfume in her hair. I wanted to touch her, but I didn't.

She said in a whisper to Hurst, 'Double your stakes.'

'Shut up,' he said.

He put down six chips on the line between 16 and 13. I reached over and put three one hundred dollar chips down on the red.

Eve turned. We looked at each other.

'Hello,' I said.

Her face became wooden and she turned away.

All right, you slut, I thought. If that's the way you want to play it.

The croupier said, '*Les jeux sont faits*,' and tossed the ivory ball into the wheel.

It came up red.

The croupier took Hurst's chips before he shoved mine over to me.

'I'll leave it there,' I said, 'O.K?'

The croupier nodded.

Hurst had lost about fifty dollars. He put more chips on the table. It came up red again.

'Leave it there,' I said.

Hurst lost his chips.

He glanced over his shoulder at me and a slight smile came into his eyes. I grinned right back at him. I could afford to.

He did elaborate things with his chips this time laying them out on the first and third dozen.

The red came up and they took Hurst's chips again. I guessed he had lost about two hundred dollars. I had about eight hundred dollars on the red now. The croupier looked at me inquiringly. I nodded.

As Hurst was about to stake again, Eve said, 'It's no good tonight. Let's go.' She looked worried.

'Shut up,' Hurst said.

That seemed to be the only thing he could say to her.

Again the red came up and again Hurst lost his chips.

I put two hundred dollar chips on *Passe* and left the pile of chips on red.

People crowded close behind me. I had quite a piece of money on the table now.

Hurst didn't stake.

The wheel spun. The ivory ball hovered over red 36, then dropped lazily into black 13.

The croupier raked in all my chips and shook his head at me. I tried to grin, but it didn't quite come off.

I'd seen fifteen hundred dollars slide through my fingers and that hurt. I let it ride.

Hurst began to stake again. This time he won. It looked like he couldn't win when I was playing. I waited a couple of rounds then I staked two hundred on the black.

The red came up.

All right, I thought, then I'll play red. I was crazy not to play the red.

I was four hundred dollars down.

As I reached forward to place my stake, I touched Eve's hip. It was like touching a live wire. She moved quickly away and that told me she knew who was touching her. I didn't care. It was enough just to stand by her and watch the man she loved losing his money.

I put down five hundred dollars on the red.

Hurst staked too.

The red came up and Hurst lost.

It went on like that for fifteen minutes. I did not stake every time. Twice I was going to take the pile of chips off the table, but something stopped me.

The red came up eleven times. I could hear all the people letting their breath out.

'Leave it on the red,' I said. There were fifty two hundred dollar chips there.

The croupier said, 'No bet.' He didn't start the wheel.

Then, right off, an argument started. A little man with a scar across his face started shouting that they had to take the bet and spin the wheel.

The croupier just sat there and shook his head.

Hurst said suddenly, 'Spin that goddam wheel.' There was a crack like a whip in his voice.

The croupier whispered something to a tall, thin bird who had pushed his way up to the table.

Hurst said, 'Tell him to spin the wheel, Tony.'

The tall thin bird looked at my pile of chips and his lips pursed. He looked at Hurst and then at me. Then he said to the croupier, 'Well, what the hell are you waiting for?'

The croupier lifted his shoulders. '*Messieurs, faites vos jeux.*'

Everyone crowded forward. It was an exciting moment. I put my hand down and found Eve's. She did not look at me, but she let me hold it. I got more of a bang out of that than I did watching the wheel spin.

The ball seemed to be taking a long time to make up its mind. It dropped into the red and seemed about to settle, then at the last moment, almost as if an unseen hand had given it a flip, it rolled into the black.

There was a long drawn-out sigh from the crowd.

'Why didn't you stop, you weak fool?' Eve said, snatching her hand away.

Hurst looked over his shoulder, stared at her and then at me. Everyone was looking at me. I just stood there, feeling weak at the knees. By just one throw too many I had gypped myself out of ten thousand dollars.

'Okay?' The thin bird asked, sneering at me.

I pulled myself together. 'Yeah,' I said and without looking at Eve, I forced my way across the crowded room to the bar.

There was scarcely anyone in the long low room. The crowd had begun to gamble and they would not start drinking again until later on in the evening. It was still early. The clock above the bar said ten five.

I ordered a double Scotch and when I had drunk it I told the bartender to leave the bottle. It was going to be a hell of an evening after all.

I stayed there for half an hour and I drank steadily. Then I saw Eve come in. She was alone. I was pretty high by now and as I was about to leave the bar and go over to her she went into the Ladies' Room. A few minutes later she came out with the red head. They passed close to me without seeing me.

The red head was saying, 'He's terrific, isn't he? He looks like a sailor and I adore his thin lips.'

Eve giggled. 'He doesn't go for red heads,' she said, her face animated.

'I'd dye for him,' the red head said and her high-pitched laugh grated on my nerves.

I watched them cross the room and go back into the roulette room. I pulled out a handful of change and shoved it at the bartender and went after them. I could not see Eve nor Hurst. The red head wasn't there either. I went into the dice room and the card room. There was no sign of them. I went up on deck.

The wind was still cold, but there were a number of couples u there.

I walked around, but I could not see them, so I went up c the top deck.

The red head was there.

'Hello,' she said.

I joined her at the rail. 'Haven't you found your friend?'

'He's gone. I came up here to see the moon again.'

I looked at her. Perhaps she was not so bad after all. I re membered how my fingers had sunk into her back.

I moved closer. 'How are you getting back?'

'By boat ... do you think I'd swim?' She laughed and laughed too. I was plastered so anything could be funny righ now; even losing ten thousand dollars.

I manoeuvered her against the rails. She did not seem t mind.

'I'm sorry I tried to hit you,' she said.

'I liked it,' I said and pulled her towards me.

She came willingly enough. This time I hurt her mouth.

'Is that all you can do?' she asked, pushing me away.

'I can drive a car and play the gramophone. My educatior has been intensive.'

'You mean extensive don't you?'

'What the hell does it matter? Who was the dark girl you were talking to?'

'Eve Marlow? Oh, she's a tart.'

'So what? ... so are you.'

She giggled. 'Only to my friends.'

'How did you come to know her?'

'How did I come to know who?'

'Eve Marlow.'

'How do you know I know her?'

'You just said so.'

'Did I?'

'Look, let's not go on like this. Let's go somewhere for a drink.'

'All right. Where?'

'I've got a car. Let's get off this lousy boat.'

'I'm not free.'

'But you said your gentleman friend had left you.'

She giggled. 'I mean you'd have to pay me.'

I grinned at her. 'Course I'll pay you.' I pulled out my roll of money and counted it. I had fifteen hundred dollars. Well, I had won five hundred dollars so it wasn't so bad. I gave her two twenties.

'Oh, I want more than that.'

'You shut up. That's just a retainer. I'll pay you more later on.'

She put her arms around me, but I shoved her off.

'Come on,' I said impatiently. 'Let's go.'

When we got back to the pier, we walked to the parking lot.

'Some car,' she said with open admiration when she saw the Chrysler.

I slid under the steering wheel and let her find her own way in. We sat side by side and looked at the moon. It was a nice moon and I was drunk, so right at that moment I felt pretty good.

'Is your wife having you watched?' the red head asked suddenly.

I turned my head to stare at her. 'What the hell are you talking about? Who said I had a wife anyway?'

She giggled. 'A dick's been tailing you all evening,' she said. 'Haven't you spotted him? I thought maybe your wife was wanting a divorce.'

'What guy?' I asked sharply.

'He's over there waiting for us to go.'

'How do you know he's been watching me?'

'He's never let you out of his sight since you were on the boat and now he's waiting for you to go so he can follow you in that heap,' she said. 'I can smell a dick a mile off.'

I remembered what Gold had said at our last meeting. 'I shall certainly think of you both. In fact, I'm not going to forget either of you. If Carol is unhappy because of you, you will be sorry. I promise you that, Mr. Thurston.' So the heel was having me tailed.

'I'll fix him,' I said, cold with fury. 'Just you stick aroun and watch me.'

'Atta boy!' the red head said, clapping her hands. 'Give th little louse a sock from me.'

I crossed the parking lot and went over to him. As soon as h saw me, he straightened and took his hands out of hi pockets.

I stood before him and peered down at him. It was dark, bu not all that dark. He was a fat faced mild little man wit rimless spectacles on his small fat nose.

'Good evening,' I said.

'Good evening, sir,' he returned, edging away.

'Has Mr. Gold hired you to watch me?'

He started to bluster, but I cut him short.

'Save it,' I said. 'Mr. Gold told me about you.'

He looked sulky. 'Well, if Mr. Gold told you, why as me?'

I smiled at him. 'I don't like being watched,' I said. 'Yo better take your glasses off.'

He began to get alarmed and looked wildly round the park-ing lot. But it was still early and there was no one but ourselve in sight. I reached forward and flicked off his spectacles, then trod on them. They crunched on the concrete.

'I can't see without my glasses,' he almost wailed.

'That's too bad,' I said, taking him by his collar. I slamme my fist in his face. I was getting good at hitting people in th mouth. Like Imgram, this little stool pigeon had trouble wit his bridgework. It got caught up in the roof of his mouth and h tried to hook out the broken pieces of bridgework. but I woul not let him. I took his small hands in one of mine and I ramme him against the wall. His hat fell off and I shifted my hands t his ears and banged his head hard against the wall, using hi ears as handles.

His knees sagged, but I held him up.

'Maybe you won't be so anxious next time to watch me,' I said, shaking him. 'If I see you again, I'll smear you on a wall.'

I gave him a quick shove and he lost his balance and sprawled

on the oily concrete. He picked himself up and began to run blindly down the street.

I lurched back for the Chrysler.

The red head was hanging out of the window.

'That was terrific,' she said, as I slid under the steering wheel. 'You're a great, big, beautiful savage.'

'You talk too much,' I returned and drove out of the parking lot and headed towards Hollywood.

Although I was pretty high, I wasn't reckless enough to take any chance of being seen with this tramp. You didn't have to look at her twice to know what she was, but she knew Eve and I was hoping she would tell me what I had always been wanting to know about her.

We stopped at several bars on our way to Hollywood and I tried to get her to talk, but she hedged. I was careful not to press her because I didn't want her to know how anxious I was to talk about Eve. The red head preferred to talk about herself and that was a subject in which I had not the slightest interest. I let her chatter away, scarcely listening to what she had to say, but I kept buying her drinks hoping that if she drank enough liquor she might be persuaded to talk about Eve.

Every bar we went into was crowded and I kept losing her and then finding her and that did not help in getting her to tell me what I wanted to know.

'I'm sick of this,' I said, leaning against the bar and holding her arm just above her elbow. 'We've got to go some place quiet. All this noise and talking confuses me.'

'Well, if we go some place quiet it's going to cost you money,' she returned, resting her small turned-up nose on the rim of her glass. 'It's going to cost you a stack of dough.'

'Don't let's keep talking about money,' I said. 'To hear you talk you'd think that's all there is in the world to talk about.'

She leaned heavily against me. 'S'matter of fact,' she said, 'that's all I am interested in, only I wouldn't let everyone know. It's not lady-like, is it?'

I regarded her. She was getting tight all right. If she had a few more drinks she wouldn't know what she was talking about. I bought two more double whiskies and while we were drinking

them I had a bright idea. I'd take her out to Three Point. It was a bright idea because it killed two birds with one stone. I would get her to talk about Eve and she would keep me company. I was not going to stay at Three Point all night by myself. Why should I? Why should Carol and Russell suddenly leave me flat without caring whether I'd be lonely or not? I decided it was the brightest idea I had thought up for a long time and I got quite excited about it. I would take this big, soft-bodied red head on the terrace and we'd watch the moon lighting the hills and Bear Lake and we'd talk all night about Eve. That seemed to me to be a pretty good way of passing the time until Carol returned.

I explained my idea to the red head.

She leaned more heavily against me. 'Suits me,' she said, 'but it'll cost you a stack of dough and I'd like some of it now.'

I gave her two twenty dollar bills to keep her quiet and steered her through the crowd into the moonlit street.

'You'll have to do better than this,' she said as she almost fell into the Chrysler. 'You can't make a girl tight and drag her off some place to look at the moon without it costing you a stack of dough.'

I told her not to worry and she said that she never worried, but it would be a good idea if I began to worry because although she was alone in the world and tried to act like a lady she had a lot of expenses and she just had to have a lot of money. After she had said all that she went to sleep and she did not wake up until I stopped the Chrysler on the sloping ramp of the garage at Three Point.

She yawned and followed me along the short path that led to the cabin.

She clung on to my arm and stumbled as she walked but after a moment or so, the mountain air steadied her up and she began to look around.

'Gee,' she exclaimed. 'Isn't this elegant.'

'Well, here we are,' I said. 'Come out on the terrace and look at the moon.'

But she was wandering around the lounge staring at everything, a little incredulous and a little bewildered.

'This must have cost a stack of dough,' she muttered to herself. 'I've never seen anything to beat this. It's terrific.'

She was overwhelmed and so envious that I decided to give her a little time to get used to the room before we settled down to talk. So I let her wander around while I fixed drinks in a large cocktail shaker.

Even after I had fixed the drinks, she was still pawing my books, my pictures, my furniture and my ornaments.

'What are you staring at?' she demanded, turning suddenly.

'You,' I said.

She came over and flopped down on the settee by my side. She put her soft arms round my neck and tried to bite my ear. I pushed her off.

She blinked at me. 'What's the matter?'

'Come out on the terrace,' I said, suddenly disgusted with her. I wanted her to tell me about Eve and then to go.

'I'm all right here,' she said, lying back, her red hair making a startling splash of colour against the white suede cushion.

'Have a drink.' I gave her half the contents of the cocktail shaker in a tumbler.

She spilt some of it on the carpet before she gulped it down. Then she hit herself on her chest with her clenched fist and let out a long gasping breath. 'Whew!' she exclaimed, 'that went right down to my feet.'

'That's where it was meant to go,' I said and got up to refill the shaker.

'You know you're the first guy who's ever taken me to his home,' she said, stretching out full length on the settee. 'I can't understand it.'

'Don't try to,' I said. 'There are some things that pass all understanding.'

She giggled. 'I bet your wife would be wild.'

'Shut up, you little slut,' I said.

'If I were your wife and I found out you brought women back to my room I'd be wild,' she said. 'I think it's a filthy trick to pull on a girl.'

'All right,' I said, coming back to her and shoving her legs

away so I could sit down, 'it's a filthy trick, but I'm lonely. My wife left me alone. That's a filthy trick too, isn't it?'

She brooded for a moment. 'You're right. A wife should never leave her man alone, I'd never leave my man alone if I kept one long enough to call him my man,' and she giggled.

'I bet Eve Marlow never leaves her husband alone,' I said casually.

The red head giggled. 'She gave him the bird years ago.'

'Oh no, she didn't. She was with him tonight.'

'Who? Don't talk wet. That's not her husband.'

'Oh yes he is.'

'That's all you know about it.'

'Now don't let's argue. I know Eve better than you do. I tell you that was her husband.'

'That shows you don't know her better than I do,' the red head said. 'I've know her for years. Her husband's Charlie Gibbs. She left him flat seven years ago. The poor little bastard. The only thing he ever did wrong was never to have any money. She still sees him from time to time when she wants to practise cursing. Can't she curse too.' The red head threw back her head and laughed until she had to mop her eyes which she did on her sleeve. 'I've heard her curse poor little Charlie. It's made my ears burn. Instead of smacking her one on her kisser, he just cringes.'

Now I was getting somewhere. 'Tell me about her.'

'There's nothing to tell. She's a tart. You wouldn't want to know about a tart would you?'

'Yes I would. I want to know all about her.'

'Well, I'm not going to tell you.'

'Oh yes you are, because I'll give you a hundred dollars if you do and you'd like that, wouldn't you?'

Her face lit up. 'It'll cost you more than that,' she said without much conviction.

'No, it won't.' I took a hundred dollar bill from my pocket and flicked her nose with it. 'Tell me.'

She grabbed at the note, but I was too quick for her. 'When you've told me and not before. I'll keep it so you can see it and I promise you you'll have it.'

She lay back and looked at the bill with such intensive greed that she sickened me.

'What do you want to know?'

'Everything.'

She told me and all the time she was speaking her eyes never left the hundred dollar bill I was holding.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THERE is no point in telling you Eve's story as I learned it from the red headed girl as she lay on the settee, maudlin with drink and anxious to earn the money I dangled before her. At first, in order to please, she mixed fact with fiction and I had to ask her many questions and go over the same ground many times before I finally learned enough of the details which, added to what I knew already, enabled me to form what I believe to be an accurate account of Eve's life.

It was only after the red head had fallen asleep – the hundred dollar bill tucked safely in the top of her stocking – and I had gone on to the terrace and had turned over in my mind what she had told me that the story finally took shape. It was like solving a difficult jig-saw puzzle and some of the pieces only appeared after I had thought back and remembered certain things that Eve had said, certain things she had hinted at and certain things that she had denied.

I had known, of course, that the key to Eve's extraordinary behaviour to me was her strong inferiority complex. I had guessed all along that this was the psychological pivot upon which her behaviour turned, but up to now, I did not realize why she should suffer from such a strong inferiority complex. When I learned that she had been illegitimate and, as a child, had had that fact continually brought home to her, I began to understand things that had previously puzzled me.

The stigma of illegitimacy can be most harmful to a child's psychological make-up if the parents show in any way that the child is unwanted. No more crushing blow can be given to a child's sensibilities if it is allowed to think that its birth is different from that of other children. Its companions – little savages that children are – are quick to seize upon any hint of illegitimacy and the child can suffer much misery by their brutal persecution.

Her parents – she was her father's daughter by another woman – had no patience with her. Her foster mother hated her since she was a living sign of her father's infidelity, and when she was young, she whipped her, and locked her in her room in the dark for long hours when she became too big to flog.

When Eve was twelve years of age, she was sent to a convent school where the Mother Superior believed that the rod exorcized evil spirits and Eve was mercilessly thrashed practically every day in the endeavour to break her rebellious spirit. But the Mother Superior was not only a sadist, she was also a bad psychologist. This treatment only brutalized Eve's mentality where a kind word might easily have saved her.

When she was sixteen, she ran away from the convent and obtained employment as a waitress in an eating house in one of the Eastside streets in New York.

There is a blank in her story for the next four years but we pick up the threads again in a shady hotel in Brooklyn where she now worked as a receptionist. The past four years had been hard on Eve. She was utterly sick of being a drudge and when Charlie Gibbs came along, she married him.

Charlie Gibbs, an inoffensive, unambitious truck-driver, had no idea what he was marrying. Eve's temper and hard little soul crushed him as effectively as if he had been fed through a wringer. She soon tired of keeping house for him and after a series of nightmare scenes which haunted Charlie for years after, she packed her bag and returned to the Brooklyn hotel.

It was not long before she became the mistress of a well-to-do business man who gave her a small apartment and visited her whenever he happened to be in the locality. He soon began to regret his choice. Eve was too much of a rebel to be at the beck and call of an elderly man who believed, quite wrongly, that he was still physically attractive. Her temper became ungovernable and the least little thing he did that annoyed her caused her to smash everything within reach. Finally the business man grew tired of her unreliable moods and giving her a generous sum of money, he got rid of her.

Having no background, no anchor, no idea of ethics, she naturally drifted to the bad. Prostitution was an antidote for her

inferiority complex. So long as men came to her, she must have felt that she could not be as dull and stupid as she imagined she was. She still made a pretence to find work, but as time went on, she became more and more dependent on men for a living, until, finally, she took the little house in Laurel Canyon Drive and set up in business as a full time professional.

So much for the history of Eve which has no special point of interest with the exception of her inferiority complex. It is a story that any woman of the streets might tell you, only Eve makes it interesting because of her psychological reaction to life.

It is obvious that, in spite of the brutalizing effects of the beatings, convent life had instilled in Eve a streak of respectability which had never been entirely eradicated. She lived – and for all I know still lives – in two worlds: the sordid existence of her profession, and the make-believe existence that her secret urge to be respectable makes her wish were true.

Jack Hurst, whom she claimed to be her husband, was not a mining engineer. He was a professional gambler who lived by his wits and his skill at cards. Eve and he had met at a party and had been immediately attracted to each other. This had happened a year or so after she had set up in Laurel Canyon Drive. Hurst was married to a woman who had grown tired of his reckless gambling and his sadistic, domineering ways. She had left him a few months before he met Eve. He was not the type of man to bother with the complicated intricacies of divorce and even if he had taken the trouble to get rid of his wife legally, I do not believe that he would have married Eve. A man has to be very sure of himself to marry a prostitute and although he found her intriguing and associated with her for such a long time, he did not appear anxious to make her his wife.

Even now I do not quite understand why Hurst remained Eve's lover for so long. He was, of course, a sadist. I knew he was that when Eve had told me of his behaviour when she had twisted her ankle. To have left her sitting on the curb and to have driven her from her bed the next morning when she could scarcely walk to get him coffee was obviously an act of a sadist.

There were other times, so the red head told me, when he treated Eve abominably, but the worse he treated her the more she seemed to admire him. There was nothing he could do that would turn her against him. She was his slave. It seems scarcely credible that Eve, in spite of her own ruthlessness and strength of character, should be a masochist beneath her wooden exterior. It is doubtful, however, whether any other man but Hurst could have roused in her this twisted heritage of a brutalized childhood. That he had done so explains why he continued the association.

Apart from Hurst, no other man stood a chance with Eve. She was simply an empty shell, devoid of any feeling, except for those twisted emotions inspired by Hurst. For ten years she had lived on men. She knew all their tricks, all their subterfuges and all their weaknesses. This existence killed her feminine instincts as surely as arsenic will kill weeds. It killed her instinct for love. I do not believe she even loved Hurst. She was drawn to him because he was the only man she had ever met who mastered her and I believe there were times when she actually hated him. The astonishing thing was that she did not show in her face the brutalizing life that she led, but there can be no doubt that it scarred her mind. She had nothing to look forward to, nothing to look back upon. Little wonder then that she tried to build around herself a world of illusion. She liked to believe that she was married to a professional man. She liked to believe that she did not live in two rooms but had a house in Los Angeles. She liked to believe that every Monday she went to the bank and put half her earnings away for the time when Hurst and she would buy their road-house. Although these fancies never materialized they made her existence possible and soothed the running sore of her inferiority complex.

I had no way of finding out whether she paraded these fancies before her other clients. No doubt she did. I now realized that the week-end we had spent together had been a week-end of lies. She had lied cleverly and I had not suspected for a moment that she was telling me anything but the truth. Perhaps the most artistic of her lies had been when she listed the number of luxury restaurants which she could not be seen in

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uppose he will find out one day. I always say my sins will find
me out and they will too. Then I'll have to run to you for
protection.'

Was she lying when she had said that? It would be easy to
trap her now. I had only to telephone the house in Laurel Canyon Drive to find out if she were still there.

I poured myself out another whisky, drank it and then looked at my wrist watch. It was twelve fifteen.

I stood up. My legs were a little unsteady, but my brain was clear. I went along the terrace to my study and opening the french windows I entered and turned on the light. I had forgotten the red head in the sitting room so absorbed had I become in stripping aside the curtain of secrecy that Eve had erected. I sat at the desk and dialled her number. The bell rang for a long time and as I was about to hang up, thinking that after all I had guessed wrong and that the house was empty, there was a sudden click and Eve said, 'Hello?'

So it was true. I need not have spoken but I could not resist letting her know that I had found her out.

'Did I wake you?' I asked.

'Oh, Clive, can't you leave me alone for five minutes?' Her voice was thick and blurred.

'You're tight,' I said.

She giggled. 'Beautifully tight. I've drunk everything in the world tonight.'

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'I like the look of your husband.'

'Everyone likes him. But go away, Clive. I can't talk now.'

'Is he with you?'

'Hm-hm . . . he's here all right.'

'I thought he didn't know you had that place,' I said.

There was a pause and I could not help smiling to myself. I would have liked to have seen her face. She must have realized that she had talked too much.'

'I was tight . . . I brought him here without thinking,' she said, at last, almost as if she were trying to convince herself. 'He's furious . . . I guess it's all over with us now.'

I nearly laughed. 'You can't mean that, Eve,' I said, trying to assume an anxious note in my voice. 'Whatever will you do?'

'I don't know.' She tried to sound worried, but she did not succeed. 'Please hang up, Clive. I've got an awful head and things are all going wrong.'

'Is he staying long?'

'No . . . no . . . not after this. He'll go tomorrow.'

'So he knows everything now?' I asked, determined to give her no respite.

'I can't talk now.' Her voice had sharpened and I could imagine those two furrows above her nose knitted in a frown. 'I must go . . . he is calling,' and she hung up.

'I've been looking all over for you,' the red head said from the door.

I got to my feet. 'I'll drive you back,' I said, determined to get rid of her at once. 'Come on, let's go.'

She stared. 'Are you crazy?' she asked. 'I'm going to bed. To hell with going all that way back. I'm tired. You told me you wanted me to stay the night and I'm damn well going to stay.'

Now that she had told me what I wanted to know about Eve I could not wait to see the last of her. To have brought such a woman into my home had been the craziest thing I had yet done.

'Oh no, you're not,' I said sharply. 'I shouldn't have brought you here in the first place. I'll get you home in an hour. Let's go.'

She sat down heavily in an armchair and kicked off her shoes. 'I'm not going,' she said obstinately.

I stood over her, cold with anger and alarm. 'Don't be a slut,' I said. 'I shouldn't have brought you here.'

She smiled. 'You should have thought of that before,' she said and yawned. She had a lot of gold work in her mouth. 'And don't look like that. I can take care of myself and I'm not scared of you.'

I suddenly wanted to get my hands round her soft fat throat, but I turned away.

'What's the matter with you?' she went on, watching me suspiciously. 'Don't you want a good time? Why have you got sore all of a sudden?'

I faced her. 'I've changed my mind,' I said, speaking slowly and deliberately. 'I'll give you one more chance. Are you going quietly or do you want me to use force?'

We eyed each other for a long moment and then she shrugged.

'All right,' she said and called me a bad name. 'Give me a drink and I'll go.'

I went onto the terrace for a bottle of Scotch.

John Coulson was sitting on the wooden seat at the bottom of the garden. As I watched him, he turned and the moonlight lit his face. He was laughing at me.

I filled a glass with whisky and drank it standing.

'You haven't anything to laugh at,' I said. 'You may think you have, but you haven't. The laugh's on you, but you're such a poor dumb cluck you don't even know it.'

I went back to the study, but the red head wasn't there.

I stood staring round the empty room for several minutes. Whisky fumes clouded my brain and I began to wonder whether I had imagined that the red head had been in this room. I began to wonder, after I had taken another drink, whether she had ever been in this cabin and after a few moments I had an ostinate idea at the back of my mind that I had never met her at all.

As I crossed the room to the settee I lurched against a table

and sent it over with a crash. A cutglass ash tray and a big vase of carnations smashed on the carpet.

'Where are you?' I shouted. 'I know you are hiding somewhere.'

I stumbled into the lobby and called again. 'Come out, wherever you are. Come-on-out!'

I waited, but the cabin was silent. Then I knew where she was. It was only because I was drunk that I hadn't thought of it before. She was in Carol's and my bedroom. I felt a great surge of hot blood rise to my head and I walked down the passage to my bedroom and turned the door knob. The door was locked.

'Come out,' I shouted, hammering on the panels. 'Do you hear? Come out!'

'Go away,' she called. 'I want to go to sleep.'

'I'll kill you if you don't come out,' I said, a vicious, desperate note in my voice.

'I'm going to sleep,' the red head shouted back. 'I'm not coming out for you or any other tight fisted punk.'

I went on hammering on the door for several minutes until my hands throbbed and burned.

Then I had an idea. 'I'll give you five hundred dollars if you'll go home,' I said, with my head against the panel of the door.

'Honest?' I heard her scramble out of bed.

'Honest.'

'Push it under the door and I'll believe you.'

'Here you are,' I said and I began to force the notes under the narrow space between the carpet and the door.

She could not wait to get it that way and she jerked open the door.

'I stepped back, staring at her in horror. She had wedged her big soft body into a pair of Carol's pyjamas and over her heavy shoulders was Carol's short ermine coat.

I let the rest of the money slip out of my fingers and I stood there unable to move or unable to say anything. She bent down and began to gather up the money. As she did so her knees burst through the thin silk of the pyjamas.

She giggled. 'Your wife must be a skinny bitch,' she said, not pausing as she grabbed at the money.

Then something made me look round.

Carol was standing in the lobby, watching us. Her eyes looked like two big holes cut in a sheet. She drew in a sharp, shuddering breath and the red head looked up. She stared at Carol and then at me.

'What the hell do you want?' she snapped, standing up and trying to cover her heavy breasts with the ermine coat. 'Me and my boy friend are engaged.'

I shall never forget the look on Carol's face. I took a step towards her, but turning swiftly, she ran down the short passage and the front door slammed.

I went after her.

As I jerked open the door, I heard her car start up and I was in time to see the red tail light flashing down the long winding drive.

I blundered out into the moonlight and began running after the car.

'Come back, Carol,' I shouted after her. 'Come back ... don't leave me, Carol,' I shouted after her '... come back!'

The red tail light disappeared round the corner where the drive entered the road.

I raced on to the gate and stood panting in the middle of the road that led to San Bernardino. The road ran straight for a mile and then turned sharply with the curve of the mountain.

I could see the red tail light moving like a ruby fired from a gun. Carol was driving very fast ... too fast. I knew the road better than she did and I suddenly began to run again, shouting after her.

'You're going too fast,' I yelled. 'Look out, Carol, my darling. You're going too fast. You won't make the turn ... slow down! Carol!! You won't make the—'

Even from that distance I heard the tires squeal on the road as the mountain curve suddenly sprang at her from out of the darkness. I saw her headlights swing out to the left and I could hear stones rattling inside the mudguards as the tires skidded.

I stopped running and fell on my knees. The noise of the tyres rose to a high pitched scream and then the car suddenly leaped off the road and went straight through the white palings. I heard a crunching, ripping noise and I watched the car hang for a second in mid-air, then it went down through the darkness into the valley.

CHAPTER TWENTY

IT was Eve. From the very beginning it had been Eve. If
had not been for her none of this would ever have happened.

I walked down Laurel Canyon Drive and passed her house
There were no lights showing. I paused, then retraced my steps.
A distant clock struck midnight. Perhaps she was asleep;
perhaps she was still out; perhaps she was at the back of the
house. I would have to find out.

I looked up and down the street, but there was no one in sight
except John Coulson. He stood in the shadows across the road,
his hands in his pockets and his head a little on one side, watching me.

I stood outside Eve's house and again looked up and down
the street. It was quiet, even the distant traffic sounded muffled.
I pushed open the gate and groped my way down the path. I
fumbled my way around to the back of the house and kicked
against a number of bottles that were stacked against the wall.
One of them rolled and smashed against something in the dark.
I stood still and listened. The back of the house was in dark-
ness. No one called out so I edged forward cautiously until I
eached a window. It was half open. I pushed it right up and
stened. No sound came from inside the house.

I leaned inside the window and struck a match. I was looking
at the small kitchen and it was as well that I had a light
cause the sink, full of dirty crockery, was immediately under
e window.

I threw the match away and stepped onto the window sill.
en I struck another match. I climbed over the sink and
ered myself to the floor.

here was a faint smell of stale cooking and a fainter smell
ve's perfume in the room. The smell of that perfume gave
cold feeling of hate deep in my guts. I went to the door,

opened it and stood in the passage. I listened, but I could hear nothing.

I was sure now that the house was empty, but I was still cautious. I edged my way to her bedroom. The door was open and I stood outside, holding my breath and listening. I stood like that for a long time until I was sure there was no one in the room. Then I went in and turned on the light.

By her bed was a large photograph. It was turned face down on the little table. I picked it up. Jack Hurst looked at me. It was a good portrait and I studied it for some minutes, then in a sudden spasm of rage, I nearly smashed it against the wall. I stopped myself in time. That would be the first thing she would miss when she entered the room. I put the photograph back as I had found it and as I did so I wondered whether Hurst would care when he heard that Eve was dead. I wondered too with a sense of malice whether the police would suspect that it might have been Hurst who had killed her.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked softly. It was twenty minutes past twelve. Any moment now, I could expect her to return. In this quiet little room, I had no feeling of time and I sat down on the bed and picked up her dressing gown. I buried my face in it, smelling her scent and the faint odour of her body.

I remembered the first time I had seen her in it. She had been squatting before the fire at Three Point. That picture conjured up a flood of bitter memories. So much had happened since then.

It did not seem that five nights ago I had watched Carol die. It had taken me more than two hours to scramble down the mountain side to reach her. I knew when I looked at the smashed car that she would not be alive. It had been very quick; her lovely little body had been jammed between a great boulder and the side of the car. I could not move her and I sat by her side with her head in my arms, feeling her grow cold until they came and took me away.

Nothing seemed to matter after that. Even Gold did not matter. He took his revenge, but I was past caring. It did not matter that he stripped me of everything. He knew, as I sus-

pected, that *Rain Check* wasn't my play. Somehow he found out about Coulson and reported what I had done to the Writers' Guild. They sent a stiff necked little man to see me. He said they would not prosecute if I repaid all my royalties. I scarcely listened to him and when he gave me a paper authorizing my bank to pay 75,000 dollars to Coulson's agent to dispose of as he thought fit, I signed it.

I had not the money of course, so they took everything I had. My Chrysler, books, furniture, clothes – everything I had, and even then they wanted more, but there was nothing more to give them.

I did not even care when they took Carol's clothes. I did not need to have anything of hers to remember her by. She was in my mind as I had last seen her jammed between the boulder and the car with a scarlet thread of blood from her lips to her chin. That memory of her will always be with me.

I think I could have borne her loss if I had been able to tell her before she died that the red head had meant nothing to me. But I reached her too late and she died thinking that big soft bodied slut of a woman had taken her place while she was away. That knowledge unhinged my mind. If I could have told her that she was the only person who had ever given me any real happiness and if she had believed me, I might not now be in this sordid little house waiting to commit murder.

Everything had happened because of Eve. I had nothing to live for, why then should she? During the past five days I had thought a great deal about her and I had decided that it would be very satisfying and final to kill her.

I went to the door, turned off the light and fumbled my way upstairs. As I reached the head of the stairs, the telephone began to ring.

I was a little unnerved now and I walked unsteadily across the landing. I went into the front room, next to the bathroom. My feet scraped on the bare boards and the moon breaking through the clouds suddenly sent a shaft of light through the uncurtained window. The room was unfurnished. From the window I could see the street, the garden and the little path that led to the house.

I leaned against the window and stared down into the street. John Coulson was still there. He had moved closer to the house and was looking up at me.

I watched him for a few minutes, then I turned away from the window. I wanted a drink. I wanted to smoke too, but I was afraid Eve would smell the burning tobacco as she came in. She must have no warning that I was in the house, waiting to kill her.

The minutes dragged slowly by and I grew impatient. I wondered where she was. Would she bring a man back with her? I had not thought of that. It was more than likely that she would do so and it would, of course, ruin all my plans.

Suddenly, without warning, something soft and yielding moved against my leg. My nerves bunched together like a coiled spring and my mouth went dry. I blundered away from the window with a faint cry.

Beside me was a large black and white cat. It looked up at me and its eyes sparkled in the moonlight.

The shock had driven the blood from my face and my heart thumped against my ribs. When, at last, I had controlled my fluttering nerves, I bent down to touch the cat, but it slid away from me and disappeared through the half open door.

Still quivering from the shock, I closed the door and as I came back to the window I heard a car coming down the road. I flattened myself against the wood and peered through the window. John Coulson had gone and the road seemed desolate without him.

A taxi-cab pulled up and the driver leaned out and opened the door. The moonlight lit the darkness inside the cab and I caught a glimpse of Eve's immaculate legs. There was a long pause before she got out. She was alone and she stood for several seconds searching in her bag before she paid the driver. He did not touch his cap, but slammed the door and then drove off without looking at her.

I watched her as she moved down the path. She walked wearily, her shoulders sagging her bag clutched firmly under her arm.

In a few seconds, she and I would be alone togethe

I was no longer afraid and my hands were dry and steady. I crept across the room and opened the door. I heard her snap back the lock and enter the lobby.

I crossed the landing and looked cautiously over the banisters and caught a glimpse of her as she disappeared into her bedroom. A light sprang up and flooded the lobby.

I heard her strike a match and I guessed she was lighting a cigarette. Then I heard her yawn. The sound ended in a groan of exhaustion, but I had no pity for her, only a cold, sullen anger and that overpowering desire to get my hands around her throat.

She moved about the room while she undressed. The house was so silent that I could hear her take off her coat, skirt and blouse. She unlocked her cupboard and I guessed she was putting her clothes away. Then she came out of the bedroom and walked into the kitchen. I saw her distinctly as she passed from room to room. She looked very slight and forlorn down there by herself. Her hair looked neat and her blue dressing gown was wrapped tightly around her.

I heard a rattle of crockery from the kitchen and, later, she returned carrying a tray for her morning coffee. She took it into her bedroom and I guessed that before long she would be coming upstairs. I stepped into the front room and closed the door.

I had not been in the room more than a few seconds before I heard her come up the stairs. She moved slowly and at the head of the stairs, she stumbled. She said 'Oh, hell!' loudly and I knew then that she was drunk.

I heard her stumbling around in the bathroom and then I heard water running. She was in there for some time, but eventually I heard her come out and go downstairs.

I edged once more onto the landing. Below me, she was bending over the cat. As I watched her, she sat on her heels and stroked the cat with quick, light movements. 'Poor old Sammy,' she said softly. 'Did I leave you all alone?'

The cat twined itself around her and I could hear its deep throated purr. I watched Eve's slim hands as she fondled the animal and I listened as she talked to it. She talked as only a

lonely woman will talk to an animal, speaking to it as if it were a child.

The cat suddenly stopped purring and looked up at me. It's tail became bushy and it spat. For a moment I stared down into its yellow eyes, then I drew back out of sight.

'What's the matter, you silly old thing?' Eve asked. 'Are there mice up there?'

My hands became clammy.

'Come on, my beauty, I'm not going to play any more with you. No, you're not going up there. I'm tired, Sammy, oh I'm so very, very tired.'

I glanced over the banisters again. Eve had picked up the cat and was disappearing into the bedroom.

I took out my handkerchief and wiped my face and hands, then went to the head of the stairs and listened.

Eve was talking to the cat. I could not hear what she said. It seemed strange to hear her voice in the silent house and not to hear anyone answer her. Then the bed creaked and I knew that she was settling down for the night.

I sat on the top stair and lit a cigarette.

As I sat there, I remembered our first week-end together. It had been exciting and intriguing because I did not then know how false and what a liar she was. I had thought that I had won her confidence and I had enjoyed her company. It was a memory that would remain with me for a long time.

I clenched my fists. If she had given just a little instead of taking all the time, this would never have happened. I wanted to be her friend but she had frustrated me at every point.

Then the light snapped off and I started to my feet; but I controlled my eagerness with an effort and sat down again. I would have to wait just a little longer. One false move now, after waiting so long, would spoil everything.

I sat there and waited for her to fall asleep.

Then out of the darkness came a new sound. Eve was crying. It was not a pleasant sound. It was so unexpected that it set my teeth on edge and gave me a cold feeling under my heart. It was the sound a woman makes who has lost everything and who

desperately lonely and miserable. Eve lay in the darkness and sobbed without any effort to control herself. She sounded tragically unhappy. At last I was face to face with the real Eve without the make-believe, without the wooden expression or the professional mannerisms. This was the Eve I had wanted to know, the real Eve who lurked behind the stone fortress, its door now open for me to see inside. This was a prostitute taking a vacation.

I sat for a long time in the darkness and listened to her. I heard her toss about in the bed and once she said, 'Oh damn and damn and damn!' and I heard her beat her fists together as her unhappiness tormented her.

At last she quieted down and there was silence. Very faintly, she began to snore. It was a strangled, gasping sound that was almost as bad as her sobbing.

My cold, vicious calm returned. I stood up and flexed my fingers. Now, I thought, I will put you out of your misery. This is the moment for which I have been waiting.

I paused outside the bedroom. I could hear Eve jerking about in bed, moaning and muttering to herself. I edged into the room and moved quietly around the bed until I was sure I was near her. I put my hand out cautiously and felt the top of the quilt and then, very slowly, I sat down on the bed. It creaked under my weight, but the movement did not wake her.

I felt her body twitch and jerk under the bedcloths. I could smell the whisky on her breath. My heart began to pound. I reached out and found the lamp switch. Holding it in my shaking fingers, I groped for her throat.

My hand hovered in the dark, then I touched her hair. She was under my hand. I drew a deep breath, clenched my teeth and snapped on the light.

She was there, close to me, my hand a few inches from her throat, but I could only sit and stare at her. I could not move. She looked so utterly helpless. She lay on her back, her lips parted and her face twitching as she slept. She looked very young and unhappy and there were dark shadows under her eyes. My hand dropped limply and I felt all the viciousness drain out of me. I knew then, as I looked down at her, that I

had been out of my mind and at the sight of her I was suddenly sane again.

I could not kill her. My mouth went dry when I realized how close I had come to doing so. I wanted to take her in my arms and feel her respond to me. I wanted to tell her that I would look after her and she need never be unhappy again.

I looked down at her, seeing her elfish, heart-shaped face with its determined chin and the two deep furrows above her nose. I thought if only she always looked like this – helpless and needing protection, the hard lines smoothed from her face and her eyelids hiding the windows of her dreadful, callous, selfish little soul. If I could only trust her not to lie or cheat or drink or to be cruel to me. But I knew that was impossible. She would never change.

The cat came and rubbed itself against my arm. I stroked it and for the first time since Carol had died, I felt relaxed and content. As I sat close to Eve, with the cat pushing its head into my hand, I realized a fulfilment of a desire that I wanted to go on and on.

Then suddenly Eve opened her eyes. She stared at me with bewildered, terrified hatred. She did not move and she seemed to have stopped breathing. We looked at each other for a full minute.

'It's all right, Eve . . .' I began, reaching for her hand.

I did not think it was possible for anyone to move so quickly. She whipped out of bed, snatched up her dressing gown and way by the door before I could touch her. There was a scraped, bony look on her face and her eyes glinted strangely in the shaded light of the lamp.

'I didn't mean to frighten you,' I said, cold with panic. 'Eve I'm sorry I did this . . .'

She mouthed at me, but no sound came. I could see she was heavy with sleep and the whisky was still stupefying her. It was only an instinct for self-preservation that had made her leave the bed so quickly. And yet, as I watched her, she frightened me more than I was frightening her.

'It's all right, Eve,' I went on, soothingly. 'It's Clive. I'm not going to hurt you.'

She said in a croaking whisper, 'What do you want?'

'I was passing and I had to see you,' I said. 'Come and sit down. It's all right, there's nothing to be afraid of.'

Her eyes were becoming alive. She licked her dry lips and when she spoke again, her voice was clearer. 'How did you get in?'

'You left a window open,' I said, trying to make a joke of it. 'I couldn't resist surprising you, but I didn't mean to frighten you.'

She still stood by the door. Her eyes began to glitter and her nostrils became pinched and white. 'You mean you broke in here?'

'I know I shouldn't have done it, but . . . well, I did want to see you.'

She drew in a deep breath and her face went livid. 'Get out!' she screamed, throwing open the door. 'Get out, you snivelling cur!'

I flinched away from her. 'Please, Eve,' I implored. 'Don't be angry with me. I can't go on like this any more. I want you to come away with me. I'll do anything for you. Only don't be angry.'

She took a step forward, her face twisted with insane rage. 'You crazy, sloppy fool,' she said in a low, vicious voice and then filth spewed out of her mouth.

I put my hands over my ears sickened and terrified by her obscenities. She crouched before me, her eyes blazing in a chalk white face. She looked hideous in her crazed fury. Her tongue lashed, soiled and burned me. 'Do you think I'd waste my time with a little two-bit jerk like you?' she finally screamed at me. 'Get out! You're never to come here again. Get out! You've hung around me until I'm sick of the sight of you. You're so thick skinned you don't know when you're not wanted. Do you think I want your lousy twenty dollar presents? Get out and stay out and never show your ugly face here again!'

My fear of her suddenly left me. Suffocating rage and a vicious desire to hit back brought me to my feet. 'You slut! I'll teach you to talk to me like that,' I shouted at her.

She screamed me down. 'I know what your game is. You're

worse than any of them. You're trying to get me for nothing. So you want me to go away with you? Why, you cheap heel, I've men with more dollars than you've got nickels who want to marry me. But I don't want them and I don't want you! I'm sick of men! I know all their filthy little tricks and their rotten little minds. I wouldn't be found dead in a ditch with a man. I know what you want, but you're not going to get it from me!'

We stood and glared at each other. The only sound in the room was the cat's deep throated purr. I wanted to smash her now. A cold, murderous rage seized me and I wanted to hit, rend and mangle her with my hands.

'I'm going to kill you,' I said softly. 'I'm going to hammer your rotten little head against the wall until your skull cracks. You'll never torment any more men after I've finished with you.'

She drew her white lips off her teeth and spat at me.

I came slowly round the bed and moved towards her. She stood her ground, her eyes blazing and her small hands like fleshless claws. Then as I reached for her, her hooked fingers slashed at my face, like a cat striking.

Her nails missed my eyes only because I jerked my head back in time, but they clawed down my nose and cheek. I was blinded with pain and fury. I struck at her, but she was too quick for me. My fist missed her head and slammed against the wall. I reeled back, crying out with pain.

She slipped out of the room and ran into the kitchen. The telephone was in there, but I gave her no time to call for help. There was no exit in that little room except through the door by which she had entered and already I was standing in the doorway.

I looked at her, feeling warm blood running from the furrows she had clawed in my face. She had pressed herself against the far wall, her hands behind her and her eyes glittering. She showed no sign of fear as I rushed at her.

As I crossed the room, she raised her arm. In her hand was a knotted dog whip. She lashed me across the face. The suddenness of the attack and the blinding pain sent me staggering back. I threw up my arms as she slashed at me again. The whip

came down across my shoulders like the torch of a red hot iron. I cried out and swearing at her, I tried to seize the thong as it whistled once more down on my head. But she moved like a lizard and she had crossed the room, turned and cut at me again as I was trying to recover my balance.

She drove me before her, her lips drawn back and her eyes like glowing embers, systematically slashing at me, hitting me round the head, back and neck.

I was stunned by the pain and I tried to get out of the room into the passage, but she headed me off.

There was no escape from that whistling thong that cut at me with white-hot streaks of pain. I stumbled over a chair as the whip curled across my eyes. The pain was excruciating and I screamed out and fell on my knees.

As she continued to slash at my unprotected head, I dimly heard someone pound on the front door. Then she stopped her insane, vicious attack and I lay on the floor, blood pounding in my ears and my body hot in agony. Way back in my head somewhere, way back in the dark, I heard voices and I felt a hand seize my arm. I was dragged to my feet.

I lurched forward, half crying with pain. Harvey Barrow stood before me. His whisky ladened breath fanned my face.

'Suffering snakes!' he exclaimed. 'You've half killed him,' and he burst out laughing.

'Throw him out,' Eve said viciously.

'I'll throw him out,' Barrow grinned, folding his fist in my shirt front. He jerked me towards him. 'Remember me?' he demanded, his coarse face close to mine. 'I haven't forgotten you. Come on, you're going for a little walk.'

He shoved me into the passage. At the front door, I tried to break away, but he was too strong. We struggled for a moment, then as he forced me out of the house, I glanced back at Eve. She stood in the lighted doorway and stared fixedly at me. I can see her now. She had pulled her blue dressing gown tightly round her and her arms were folded across her flat breasts. Her face was wooden. Her eyes were wide and glittering and her mouth was set in a hard thin line. As our eyes met she tossed up her head in an arrogant gesture of triumph. Then Barrow

shoved me into the street and that was the last I ever saw of her.

'Now, you masher,' Barrow said, showing his short yellow teeth. 'Maybe you'll leave her alone.' He drew back his fist and hit me in the face.

I sprawled in the gutter and lay there.

He bent over me. 'I owe you that,' he said, 'and I owe you something else.' He dropped a hundred dollar bill and a ten dollar bill in the gutter beside me.

I watched him walk down the path and into the house. Then the front door slammed behind him.

As I reached for the notes, John Coulson burst out laughing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A STORY never ends.

You throw a stone into a pond and in a few seconds it has disappeared. But that is not the end of it. Your action affects the surface of the pond and circular ripples begin to form at the point where the stone has hit the water. These ripples gradually widen until the whole surface of the pond is in gentle motion. It takes a long time for the pond to become still again.

I sit at my typewriter in my shabby room and look out of my window at the water-front of this small Pacific coast town. Russell is waiting patiently for me to begin the day's work, but today, I am in no hurry to join him.

We have a boat and for the past year we have taken hundreds of tourists to the chain of small islands that skirt this Pacific coast-line. I run the boat and Russell sits in the bows and tells the tourists stories of gun runners and Chink smugglers who used these islands many years ago. The tourists seem to like Russell and he, in his turn, seems to like them. Personally I hate their stupid sheep-like faces and the sound of their strident voices, but as I remain on the bridge during the trips I do not have any contract with them.

We do not make a great deal of money, but we get along all right. Russell is very thrifty and has already put enough by to see us through the slack season.

No one has ever heard of me in this town. My name means nothing to the tourists, but perhaps if this book is ever published, I will see my name in print again. Oddly enough I do not mind being a nobody. I did at first, but as time passed I realized that I would not have to worry about writing a new novel or a play. I would have no bills to pay and I would not have to entertain and do the hundred and one things that a celebrity has to do. I was now free of all that and, although I

missed some of the trappings of fame, I decided that I was happier as a nobody.

I don't know what I should have done without Russell. I owe everything to him. It was he who found me, half-crazed, lying in the gutter outside Eve's house. I was lost and if he had not come along at that crucial moment I believe that I would have taken my life.

It was Russell who had bought the boat. It was a fine thirty-foot job fitted with a hundred horse Kermath. He bought it with his savings. I did not like his buying it, but it either meant that or starving. So I let him buy it.

At first, I thought it was a crazy idea, but Russell had it all worked out. He said that an out-door life would put me on my feet again, and besides, he liked an out-door life himself.

At that time I did not care what happened to me, but I felt I had to point out that he was sinking his money in a forlorn hope, but he just let his eyebrows crawl up his forehead which was as good as saying, 'wait and see'.

I was much more enthusiastic, however, when we went down to the harbour and inspected the boat. Although Russell had paid for it out of his own pocket, he managed to make me feel that I had as big a share in it as he had. Although we were now no longer master and servant, it seemed only right that I should be the captain and he should be the mate.

We had only one awkward moment before we settled down to our new roles. It happened when we decided to re-name the boat. I said right away that we should call it 'Eve'. I pointed out that the tourists would remember a name like that and since it did have rather a wicked flavour they would even gain some harmless amusement from it. Anyway that's how I put it to him.

But Russell would not hear of it. I had never known him to be obstinate before and after trying to persuade him for some time, I finally lost my temper and told him he could call the boat anything he damn well pleased.

When I went down to the harbour the next morning, I found a sign writer had put Carol's name on the stern of the boat in red, two-inch high letters. I stood looking at her name for

several seconds and then I went to the end of the deserted je
and sat with my back to the waterfront and looked out at t
Pacific.

It was nearly an hour later when Russell joined me. I to
him that he was right about naming the boat after Carol. H
didn't say anything but from that moment we got along fin
together.

Well, that's how it is with me. I don't know how long it'll
last. I don't know if this book is going to be a success or not. If
it is, I might go back to Hollywood. Without Carol I know
Hollywood would be an unfriendly place. I don't know whether
I could face it again. Carol's death has strangely affected me. It
is only now that I realize how much she really meant to me. It
is so often the case that the thing you value most in life is not
appreciated until you lose it. By losing Carol I found myself
and I feel that I can face up to my future with confidence,
knowing that Carol's influence will always be with me.

Although it is now two years since I last saw Eve, I still think
of her. Not long ago I had a sudden desire to find out what had
happened to her. I had no intentions of renewing our acquaint-
anceship, but I did want to satisfy my curiosity and to discover,
if I could, how she had fared during the past two years.

I found the little house on Laurel Canyon Drive empty. The
windows were uncurtained and the garden was a wilderness;
that furniture that I had come so used to seeing had vanished.
The people next door could not tell me where Eve had gone.
he woman who came to the door smiled in a superior, sec-
ive way. 'A midnight flit,' she explained, 'and about time
. No, I don't know where she's gone. I don't care. Good
dance, I say. I shouldn't be surprised if the police weren't
king for her. Anyway she's gone. We don't want her sort in
road, thank you.'

have no means now of finding Eve. It is a pity. I would like
ep in touch with her, without her knowing, of course, since
ldn't imagine what her end will be. Will she give up her
ssion? Will she go back to Charlie Gibbs? Or will she
on until she becomes just another worn out, drink sodden
opelessly plying for hire on the streets? I don't know.

Perhaps one day we will meet again; although I feel that it is not likely. If she is in trouble with the police she will change her name and vanish from her usual haunts.

It was only recently I picked up a copy of Voltaire's *Candide* and found in it some lines that seemed appropriate not only to Eve's future but to the future of that regiment of women who follow a profession which occupies a definite place in our present society.

I was obliged to continue that abominable trade which you men think so pleasing, but which to us unhappy creatures, is the most dreadful of all sufferings. Ah, sir, did you but know what it is to be obliged to lie with every fellow; with old tradesmen with counsellors, with monks, watermen, and abbés; to be exposed to all their insolence and abuse; to be robbed by one gallant of what we get from another; to be subject to the extortions of civil magistrates; and to have for ever before one's eyes the prospect of old age, an hospital, or a dunghill, you would conclude that I am one of the most unhappy wretches breathing.

As I say, I don't know. I feel that Eve's destiny is largely in her own hands. She is not a weak woman and I feel hopeful that a time will come when she will face up to her future as I am facing up to mine. I should not like to be far away when that happens.

I have often wondered why I did not succeed in gaining her confidence. I now realize that it was too much to expect that I would ever gain her affection, but I should at least have gained her confidence. I have always believed in the theory that a woman's emotions can hold out only for so long against the impact of a man's mind. But, obviously, Eve was no ordinary woman. Perhaps I had been over anxious. Perhaps I gave up too soon. I don't know. It was a difficult task not only because Eve knew every move in the game, but because the line that devides loathing and loving in a woman's heart is very fine. I may have had too clumsy a touch.

Now that I can look back in our association over a bridge of two years, I can say that although she caused me much pain and bitterness, it was an experience that I would not have missed.

Our week-end together was in itself an intense physical impact that few men have experienced. And I do believe that she enjoyed it as much as I did. But I made the mistake of continuing our association when I should have seen her no more after that week-end.

But why go on? I have gained experience from the past and I must prepare for the future. I must stop now. Russell is looking anxiously up at my window. I can see the sun catching the glass of his watch which he holds in his hand. Already *Carol* has her full complement of tourists. They are waiting for me.